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From Cult Wars to Culture Wars:
New Religious Movements and American Politics, 1965-1995

By

Grace Morrison Goudiss

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in

History

in the

Graduate Division

of the

University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:

Professor Mark Brilliant, Chair
Professor Ronit Stahl
Professor Waldo Martin
Professor Karen Barkey

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Abstract

From Cult Wars to Culture Wars:
New Religious Movements and American Politics 1965-1995

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Doctor of Philosophy in History

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This dissertation tells a story of American religion and politics since the 1960s in which the fringe helps illuminate the center. In it, I explore the role of new religious movements (NRMs)—also known pejoratively as cults—in American politics, alongside intertwined issues of political realignment, the family as a site of ideological contestation, and questions of what constituted faith. In the 1970s and 1980s, the left-wing Peoples Temple (of Jonestown infamy) and the conservative Unification Church (referred to derisively as Moonies) achieved legitimacy and influence within the Democratic and Republican parties, respectively. In this same period, the notion that cults presented a threat to the American family, and society in general, gained currency and publicity. In the 1970s, NRM members, families, politicians, courts, and the media participated in tense debates over what constituted a legitimate religion as well as a legitimate family. Collectively, these conflicts are known as the "cult wars." In the 1970s, the cult wars were importantly bipartisan and multifaith, as Jews, Christians, and secular activists banded together to address the so-called "cult problem." The Unification Church found itself at the center of these early cult wars, while Jim Jones and Peoples Temple rose to prominence within the liberal/left spectrum in California.

After the Jonestown tragedy in November 1978, which coincided with the rise of a newly vocal and visible Christian right, the cult wars turned partisan. Jonestown occasioned a tense debate over minority religions and religious freedom, and left an opening for the Unification Church to make a successful claim to legitimate churchdom as well as to align itself politically with the anticommunist, pro-family agenda of the Republican Party. Questions raised in the cult wars of the 1970s—what was a religion? what was family?—got answered in narrow, conservative terms in the context of the culture wars of the 1980s, in which conservatives fought against a progressive vision of America that had become increasingly mainstream since the 1960s. During this period, the struggle against cults took on a Christian tone, as NRMs associated with the occult or New Age came under special scrutiny, culminating in the Satanic Panic of the mid- and late-1980s. I argue that the "cult wars" that began in the 1970s set the terms of the culture wars of the 1980s by politicizing questions of family and faith and promoting normative, conservative definitions of what constituted acceptable modes of worship and belonging.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to those lost at Jonestown in November 1978, and to their families.

Acknowledgments

Archives are the heart of historical work, and I have been exceedingly fortunate to be able to work in and work with some incredible collections and people. I would first like to thank the Bentley Library at the University of Michigan; the Charles E. Young Library at the University of California, Los Angeles; the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley; the Jacob Marcus Rader Center at the American Jewish Archives; and the Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics for their generous funding and belief in this project. I would be absolutely lost without the wonderful people making those archives run, who always offered keen expertise and limitless patience. These include: Sara Gard D'Antonio and Julie Clover at the Dole Institute; David Stiver at the Graduate Theological Union; Marie Silva at the California Historical Society; Dana Herman and Dr. Gary Zola at the American Jewish archives; and of all of the other exceptional archivists who made this project possible.

Finishing this project has caused me to reflect on the mentors who motivated and challenged me to think and write like a historian. Howard Brick, Nadine Hubbs, Jay Cook, and others at the University at Michigan changed my life, encouraging me to take on history as a professional pursuit. The seven years I spent at the University of California, Berkeley transformed me intellectually. The questions I ask, and the way I view the world, will forever be shaped by the brilliant historians I had the pleasure of working with at Berkeley. These include James Vernon, Tom Laqueur, David Hollinger, Brian Delay, Rebecca McLennan, Margaret Chowning, David Henkin, and a host of others. My students have shown me the stakes of teaching and writing, and have kept me honest, curious, and clear in my intentions. I owe them all thanks, but am especially grateful to my R1B class who managed to be thoughtful, engaged, and hilarious even at 8am on Zoom.

My committee has made this dissertation possible, and pushed me to grow intellectually in ways I didn't know I was capable of. Karen Barkey taught me how to think about religion and its contemporary stakes in a much more textured and interdisciplinary way. She has also been a model of how to build and maintain community with her warm heart, sharp mind, and fabulous dinner parties. Waldo Martin is a truly one-of-a-kind. He always brought his powerful wit and a shared sense of humor to all of our endeavors. I can only aspire to be as justice-minded, relatable, kind, and hilarious as he is, not to mention brilliant. Ronit Stahl's arrival in our department at the beginning of my fourth year of grad school was described as "manna from heaven" for me and my project. I could not have known then how accurate this characterization was: an energetic, super-smart historian of American religious history, Ronit not only brought needed expertise but invaluable guidance to me as a young woman trying to write and teach in the insane churn of the 2020s. She is an incredibly caring teacher and advisor, always ready to answer a historiography question or quell dissertation anxieties, even via text at 9pm. At my first meeting with Mark Brilliant, we gushed about Merle Haggard and identified the shared "habits of the mind" that would define our exceptional seven-year working relationship. Mark has been as fierce a champion as I have ever had. He has never let me phone it in, believing in me as a writer, historian, teacher, curriculum developer, and overall coconspirator. He has also encouraged my instinct that the purpose of history is to challenge and surprise us, deepening our understanding of the world even when our conclusions make us uncomfortable. It has been an honor to be part of the Brilliant Bunch, Mark, and I hope you will always be my advisor.

Among the most important support in the writing of this dissertation has been reading groups of both faculty and other graduate students, including the Brilliant Bunch, Berkeley West, the Nirking Group, and Waldo Martin's nameless but iconic reading group. I got amazing feedback from my professors but also from my inspirational grad school colleagues. You guys made this process fun and sharpened my thinking at every stage. I wish I could name everyone, but BK Williams, Derek O'Leary, Anthony Gregory, Tim Wright, Danny Kelly, Hilary Lynd, Camilo Lund-Montano, Daniel Steinmetz-Jenkins, Joseph Ledford, Natalie Novoa, and John Handel come to mind as some people who made grad school worthwhile just for their friendship and brilliant historical minds.

My pandemic family helped me through one of the most difficult, but also transformative, periods I have experienced: Peter Vale, Claire Wrigley, Ryan Stough, Natalie Quinn, Sarah Monahan, Sophie FitzMaurice, JT Jamieson, Liz Chadwick, Kyle Jackson, and Liya Rechtman kept me sane (and crazy, in a good way). You all made interacting with the same people over and over magically fun and continuously exciting. I don't know where I'd be without Cody Pan whose friendship has been a north star for the last decade. Thank you for making sure we are never apart for long. Greg's huge heart and tireless ears got me over the finish line and made me able to see the beautiful future that lays beyond it. Simon Brown is one of my favorite people in the world to talk to about politics, history, and everything else. Thank you for keeping me on the right side of the culture wars. Maria Reis and Lois Rosson are not only my friends, they are my sisters. Mary Sue: *tô com você, tô com Deus*. Lois was my first friend in grad school, and the one I have been through everything with—grad school-related and not—side by side. My forever work wife, I could not have done this without you. I am so proud of us.

My crazy, boisterous, loving Florida (and Georgia and Texas) family has always embraced me for being me, and shown encouragement and pride every step of the way. Most of all, I am indebted to my New Yorkers—Maxine, my brother Max, and my parents Al and Deb. My family has given me the most critical tools in a historian's toolbox: curiosity, empathy, a passion for learning, indignity at injustice, and an obsession with the wild and wacky world of American culture. They have also taught me all I know about unconditional love, compassion, loyalty, and unity. I would not trade being the four of us for anything. This is for you.

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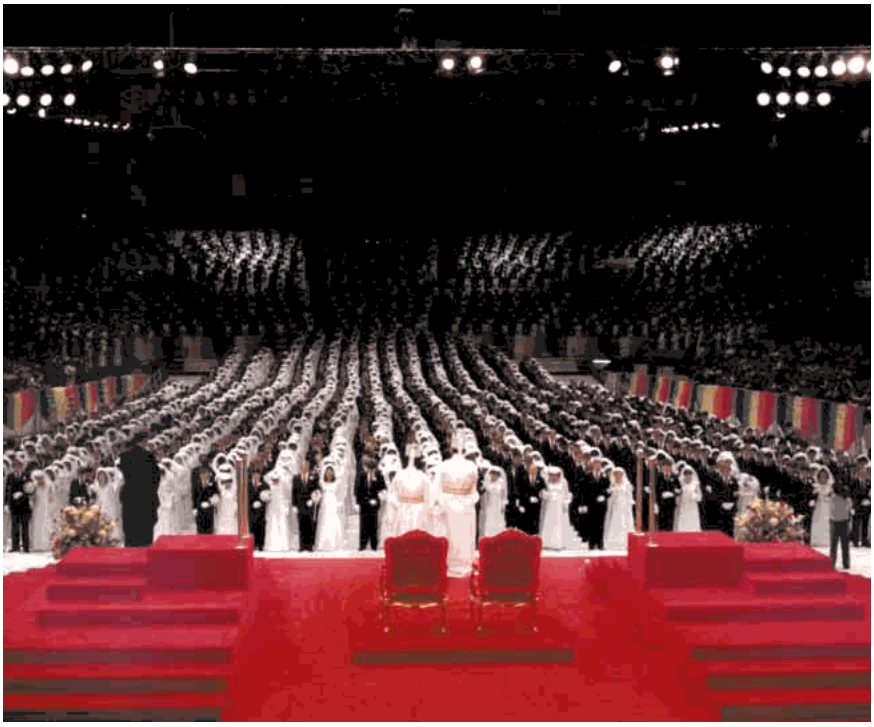
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Introduction:
From Cult Wars to Culture Wars: New Religious Movements and American Politics, 1965-1995

When prompted to give their immediate associations with the word "cult," or certainly the phrase "Peoples Temple," many people might conjure horrific images of the dead at Jonestown, where nearly one thousand members of Jim Jones's group lost their lives on November 18, 1978. Images of bloated corpses laid neatly side by side in the hot Guyanese sun have been seared into our cultural memory, as has the ghoulish injunction against "drinking the Kool-Aid," in reference to the Temple members acts of self-poisoning [see below]. Jones himself has become a villainous symbol of violence, madness, and manipulation, his dark sunglasses lending him an air of inscrutability. The Unification Church, on the other hand, evokes images that are less gruesome but equally odd—most familiarly pictures of "Moonie" mass weddings, like the one below, taken at Madison Square Garden in 1982. Thousands of couples, all of whom had met mere days before the ceremony, submitted simultaneously to a lifelong spiritual and legal marriage to a partner chosen for them by their religious leader and "True Father," Reverend Sun Myung Moon. Media fascination with cults, and a never-ending stream of new true-crime style docuseries and podcasts, has catered to a universal instinct to engage with the macabre and bizarre. Part of what makes cults so perennially interesting has to do with scale. These images remind us of the scale and stakes of "cult" membership. People can lose themselves and their sense of individuality in matters as sensitive as marriage and as serious as death. It makes us wonder: could this happen to me? To a member of my family? And how?



Jonestown, 1978.

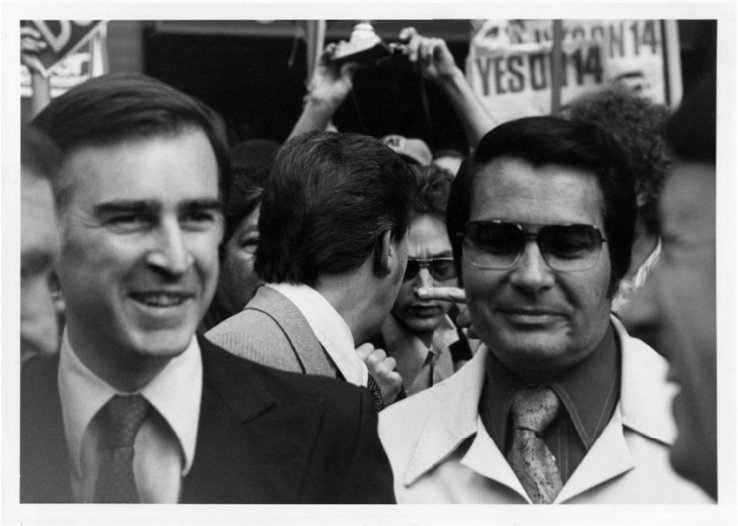


Unification Church Mass Wedding, Madison Square Garden, 1982.

As arresting and moving as these images are, their ubiquity limits us in our analysis of the movements they represent and what insight they can provide about our world. Images like this 1976 photograph of Jim Jones and former California Governor Jerry Brown [see below], or another of the Reverend Moon and President Richard Nixon from 1974 [see below] may prove more illuminating. In the first, Jones dons his signature shades and a smile, marching alongside Brown in support of Proposition 14 which aimed to help farm workers unionize more effectively in the state of California. In the second, Reverend Moon beams as he shakes the hand of Nixon, who had not yet resigned from office but was already in the thick of the Watergate scandal that would end his political career in disgrace. Beyond their apparent incongruity—what are these "cult" leaders doing alongside nationally known elected officials?—the photographs help reframe our analysis of not only the groups these men represented, but of the political figures with whom they appear. This is because religion acts as a perennially significant source of power and influence in American politics: with whom politicians choose to publicly and privately associate has great repercussions not only for their reputations, but for their understanding of issues, communities, and policy.

In other words, these pictures help show how the fringe can explain the center. Peoples Temple and the Unification Church, portrayed as so extreme in the death and marriage images, were in fact at some point respectable, socially integrated, and politically useful to those in power. Sometimes politicians—those least incentivized to publicly associate with "kooks" and fringe whackos—welcomed these groups and integrated them into their coalition as legitimate religions. People didn't just join these groups because they "snapped" as their life circumstances made them willing to languish on society's fringes. Members of these movements, like many other religious devotees, found the world problematic but felt compelled to live in it and try to change it. Peoples Temple rallied against racism at home and abroad, and sought to improve the

quality of life for people who were older, or who struggled with addictions or developmental disabilities. Unification Church members, on the other hand, promoted social programs of their own and took on what they saw as the greatest scourge threatening democracy—communism. In their ideologies, and in their activist efforts, the UC and PT shared common cause with politicians, who welcomed them as important community players, fundraisers, and allies.



Jim Jones and Jerry Brown, 1976.[1]



Sun Myung Moon shakes hands with President Richard Nixon, January 1974.

[1] From the Jones Family Memorabilia Collection, Special Collections and University Archives, San Diego State University Library.

Moon and Jones thus served as more than ubiquitous "cult" leaders. In their political activism, Peoples Temple and the Unification Church each emerged as influential local, national, and global movements. Peoples Temple was a radically race conscious and leftwing group based in the Bay Area. While the group attempted to participate in Black anticolonialism and internationalism by way of their settlement in Guyana, their story ended in tragedy and became a cautionary tale evoked by the settlement's name alone: Jonestown. By contrast, the Unification Movement, founded by Sun Myung Moon in Korea in the 1950s, was denigrated as a dangerous and wacky cult in the 1970s before becoming a force in the Republican party in the 1980s and 1990s. As Moon's movement globalized, his followers embraced anticommunist politics as well as social conservatism that aligned them with the American right. At the same time, however, Moon and many followers were subjected to prejudice for their "foreign" roots, vast financial holdings, and political involvement.

Each of them amassed a significant following on account of their religious teachings, but also gained an audience with mainstream political figures and had an outsized role in shaping and contributing to the political ethos of their moments. In the Democratic Party, Peoples Temple represented the strong tradition of Black churches and civil rights activism; for the GOP, it was the staunchly anticommunist, family values-oriented Unification Church. But these groups didn't merely act as fun-house mirrors of the more legitimate religio-political alliances of the MLK-aligned Democrats of the 1960s and 1970s or the ascendent religious right of the 1980s and 1990s. These movements changed the religio-political landscape and forced politicians on both sides of the aisle to reckon with questions of free will, religious freedom, extremism, and what constituted acceptable belief in a period of immense political and religious change. This story does not move in straight line; it is not one of pious Republicans and godless Democrats, or of freedom-fighting Democrats and theocratic Republicans.[2] Both the movements themselves, and critics of "the cults," could be found within many religious faiths and political alignments.

So-called fringe movements not only reflected the political milieu in which they operated, but indeed influenced some of the most significant issues of the period. The Unification Church fit the Republican mold of anticommunist and pro-family politics; but it also helped bolster these causes within the Party, funding candidates of its choice as well as creating the intellectual space, through sponsoring conferences, campus groups, and PACs, to solidify a late and post-Cold War vision for the Republican Party. The Unification Church in America began as a small utopian group, part Christian mission, part devoted messianic movement, part social action organization. Its members allied with the Nixon administration during the Watergate scandal in 1974; the Church then spent the rest of the 1970s as public "cult" enemy number one, culminating in its role in a probe of Korean-American relations in 1977 and 1978, in which a congressional subcommittee investigated (but could produce little concrete evidence

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[2] Over the last several decades, the so-called God Gap—the idea that religious people tend to vote Republican and secular ones Democrat—has been a popular topic of punditry and research. My work does not engage in modern questions of demographics and modern politics; however, other scholars have explored and complicated notions of polarization according to level of religious commitment, rather than denominational lines. See Ryan L. Claassen, *Godless Democrats and Pious Republicans?: Party Activists, Party Capture, and the "God Gap,"* Cambridge Studies in Social Theory, Religion, and Politics (New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, [2015) ; Robert D. Putnam and David Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010). For a historical treatment of this process, and the ways in which forming a multi-faith religious conservative coalition was fraught and difficult, see Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199738984.001.0001.

for) the claim that the group was not only a cult but agents of a foreign government. In the 1980s, "Moonies" remained a subject of ridicule, fascination, and sometimes fear for the media; at the same time, however, the UC transformed itself into a martyr of religious persecution by the government, and increasingly fought for (and gained) recognition from fellow religious conservatives as a legitimate church. As mainstream conservative Christians gained power, so too did the Unification Church: by the late 1980s and 1990s, the tiny fringe movement turned maligned "cult" bogeyman wielded immense power in the Republican Party.

Peoples Temple provides a photographic negative of the success of the Unification movement's politics and fate. What also began as a small utopian religious movement grew into a symbol of progress for the Democratic Party: by the mid-1970s, as the press and public maligned the Unification Church, Jim Jones's group by and large appeared a boon for the liberal/left in California. Peoples Temple combined the iconic antiracist organizing and activism of Southern Black civil rights-oriented Christianity with the countercultural impulses of young seekers purusing alternative political, spiritual, and living arrangements in places like San Francisco, where Peoples Temple was based before fleeing for Guyana. Jones's message and community appeared religious—churchly and respectable—but also contained the radical race and class conscious politics that spoke to the more left-leaning Democrats who had been radicalized in the crucible of 1960s and 1970s-era upheavals. Jones rose to great heights in San Francisco politics, and he received accolades and friendship from a number of powerful Democrats, liberals, and leftists.

By 1977, Jones's allies began to split over activities at Peoples Temple's remote outpost in South America, but by the time there was real national coverage—in the form of the fact finding mission led by Congressman Leo Ryan—it was too late. The infamous and eponymous tragedy at their compound in Jonestown, Guyana in November of 1978 would solidify their status as the ur-cult in American history.[3] The Jonestown events also had profound political implications. At a time when the increasingly visible Christian right made increasingly conservative claims about what constituted legitimate versions of family, religion, and American identity, Jonestown solidified an association of violence with cults. Unorthodox, transgressive, and progressive movements became suspect, and easily targeted by conservatives looking to denounce the breakdown of "traditional" American religious and cultural norms.

Long before conservatives latched onto unfamiliar religions as scapegoats, what I refer to as the anticult movement, or ACM, argued that NRMs constituted a serious threat to American life.[4] This coalition—a diffuse group ranging from hardcore anticult activists to concerned

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[3] Most obviously, the phrase "drink the Kool-Aid" has entered our lexicon as a shorthand for blind faith and suicidal conformity. The group has been the subject of dozens of films and documentaries including, Stanley Nelson's PBS documentary *Jonestown: The Life and the Death of Peoples Temple* (2006) and the fictional *Jonestown: Paradise Lost* (2007), and an upcoming feature-length film in production at MGM Studios starring Leonardo DiCaprio as Jim Jones. Peoples Temple more generally, as well as Jonestown itself, has also inspired many popular written accounts, including Reiterman's *Raven* and Jeff Guinn's *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple*. Jonestown is frequently used a case study or example in popular writing on NRMs and cults more generally, as in Adam Morris's *American Messiahs: False Prophets of a Damned Nation* and Amanda Montell's *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism*. True crime-focused podcasts have also taken up Peoples Temple's story, including a series of the popular *Last Podcast on the Left*, a full show entitled *Transmissions from Jonestown*, and dozens of others. The Sundance Channel also released a documentary TV series in 2018 called *Jonestown: Terror in the Jungle*.

[4] While anticult movement (ACM) was long used to refer to this diffuse group, their relatively recent détente with the NRM side has led to a softening of terms on both sides. In a recent essay on the history of the "cult wars," for instance, NRM scholar Eileen Barker used the phrase "cult awareness movement," or CAM. While that makes sense when referring to those still active in such efforts, I find that ACM—while harsher—conveys more accurately the

families of NRM members— constitutes the third major prong of the dissertation, alongside the UC and PT. Following NRM scholars, I use the phrase "cult wars" to refer specifically to the confrontation between two sides, broadly "deprogrammers, concerned parents, anti-cult organizations, and evangelical Christian missionaries on one side; and the proponents of specific new religious movements, civil liberties, and youth culture on the other."[5] The ACM was crucially bipartisan: in the 1970s, the cult issue in transcended political boundaries even if it also provided a setting for grappling with some of the most pressing political and social questions of the period. The two-sided confrontation between the ACM and NRMs and their allies produced the cult wars (the conflict itself) and the cult scare (the moral panic around cults) in the 1970s..

Debates around cult/NRM membership and its meaning for American society led to broader reckonings in the 1970s, especially in the context of religious realignment across political parties. Famously, liberal evangelical Jimmy Carter (whose wife Rosalynn was an acquaintance of Jim Jones) received 75% of the evangelical vote in 1976; in 1980, his Republican opponent Ronald Reagan won by the same margin. This realignment arrived shortly after the 1978 tragedy at Jonestown tarred alternative leftwing/alternative religions with an association of death and destruction. The Democrats did not abandon religion in the 1980s, but rather made it a private matter for voters rather than a staple of party identity. Respecting religious people and practices of worship, they declined to make religion itself a frequent matter of policy or to identify with one religious tradition above all others. The Democrats thus went forward trying to bind together seemingly disparate factions and diverse versions of religion, family, and American belonging. In doing so, some historians have argued that they sacrificed a broader, more capacious vision of social justice, the welfare state, and universal rights—some of the visions that infused the leftist religious politics of Peoples Temple.[6] In other words, after Carter's defeat, the Democrats rethought its relationship to religion, and Christian voters their relationship to the Democrats. On the flip side, the Republican Party, and conservatives in general, spent considerable time pitching themselves as the party of God and Christianity, doubling down on claims to normative, conservative visions of both family and religion.

The intertwined fates of these three forces—Peoples Temple and its left/liberal allies; the Unification Church and its conservative Christian coalition partners; and the anticult/cult awareness activists who rejected 'cultic' influence in American politics, homes, and families—tell a story in which the fringe explains, shaped, and set the course of the center. The oft-asked question of what makes a cult a cult ignores that politics shape what is permissible and deemed legitimate in the United States.[7] Religions do not self-legitimate, but rather their cultural context allows some groups to emerge as religious and, at times, as *American* religions.[8] The stunning

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sense provided by my sources about the attitudes of most people on this side of the fence, though I want to emphasize that I recognize a range of sentiments, approaches, and relationships to the cult/NRM issue among those I categorize within the broad umbrella of ACM.

[5] Benjamin Zeller, "Writing On and Researching New Religious Movements: A View from the American Academy," in *Cult Wars in Historical Perspective*, ed. Eugene Gallagher (Routledge, 2019), 55.

[6] See, for instance, Lily Geismer, *Left Behind: The Democrats' Failed Attempt to Solve Inequality*, First edition (New York: PublicAffairs, 2022).

[7] The problem of defining a cult preoccupies many serious and casual observers of NRMs as well as "cult" phenomena that are less easily classified as religious. I follow consensus among NRM scholars that cult is a label applied to unpopular groups, rather than a definable sociological or religious category. For an in-depth discussion of labels applied to religious groups, see David G. Bromley, "Categorizing Religious Organizations," The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements, June 1, 2016, https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780190466176.013.1.

[8] NRMs did not appear as a new phenomenon in the 1960s, and in fact have been a hallmark of American religious history for centuries. Religions including Mormonism, Seventh Day Adventism, Jehovah's Witnesses, Christian

evolution (and reversal) of the trajectories of the Unification Church and of Peoples Temple suggests that labels such as "cult" are questionable not only because they smack of prejudice, but because cult as a category is highly unstable. Peoples Temple and the Unification Church are thus best treated not as oddities or cautionary tales which fueled morbid curiosity and the true crime-industrial complex, as they often are.[9] Rather, they should be thought of as religious and political movements whose legitimacy or lack thereof depended as much on the needs of the dominant culture in which they operated as it did any intrinsic or anthropological sense of cultishness.

While the ACM thought broadly in terms of what constituted a cult, and indeed scholars have taken a wide view of what counts as an NRM, this study has a relatively narrow focus on two primary groups. This decision reflects several key characteristics of the Unification Church and Peoples Temple: each of these movements claimed to be offshoots of Christianity, and as such gained political legitimacy and influence within a political context that valued churches as significant partners in religious coalitions. They both also moved in and out of "cult" status, variously entering phases of meaningful legitimacy and acting as symbols of the most dangerous and extreme alternative religions.

In this dissertation, I argue that the cult wars that began in the 1970s helped produced the culture wars of the 1980s by politicizing questions of family and faith and promoting normative, conservative definitions of what constituted acceptable modes of worship and belonging. The 1960s saw upheavals of accepted cultural and political norms and widespread intergenerational strife. Young people in the 1960s and 1970s joined new religious movements with increasing frequency, asserting their right to choose not only their religion but new families as well. Some biological families disputed this right and claimed that their loved ones were not making active choices but rather had been brainwashed by cult leaders. The ACM feared that NRM activity had the potential to cleave apart family and religion, as the new spiritual marketplace offered seekers more opportunities than ever to choose their faith and abandon the one they had grown up in. NRM members, families, politicians, courts, and the media then participated in tense debates over what constituted a legitimate religion as well as a legitimate family. The Unification Church found itself at the center of the early cult wars, as it symbolized foreign influence, the abandonment of communities of origin, and the total commitment of its members to a leader, Reverend Sun Myung Moon. At the same time, Peoples Temple grew in legitimacy and

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Scientists, and many others began as small (and sometimes persecuted) sects in the nineteenth century before being welcomed into mainstream acceptance in the 20th century. Nor is the study of NRMs new. As an example, Black religious traditions have both been long-studied and caused significant controversy and moral panic. For instance, anthropologist Arthur Huff Fauset published his seminal *Black Gods of the Metropolis; Negro Religious Cults of the Urban North* in 1944. The groups Fauset studied, as well as other predominantly Black NRMs like the Nation of Islam, attracted attention and criticism in the 1930s-1960s, long before the cult scare of the 1970s.

[9] Cults as a general category has long been popular fodder for true crime series and films. Discovery's *People Investigates: Cults*; Oxygen's *Deadly Cults*; and A&E's *Cults and Extreme Belief*, to name a few. Individual movements and events have also drawn significant attention in television and movies, including: the Rajneeshee movement in Netflix's *Wild Wild Country*; various media about Peoples Temple (noted above); the 1994 siege at the Branch Davidians' compound in *Waco* (Paramount); and HBO's series *Heaven's Gate: Cult of Cults*. Scientology and its defectors have been the subject of several documentaries and TV shows, including *Scientology and the Aftermath*, hosted by the actress and ex-Scientologist Leah Remini, and HBO's hit documentary *Going Clear: Scientology and the Prison of Belief*. Mormonism and the practice of polygamy have likewise been fodder for similar TV series and movies, including the long-running TLC reality series *Sister Wives* and HBO's scripted series *Big Love*. More recently, Keith Raniere's abusive self-help group NXIVM became a much discussed "cult" story on the screen, with two blockbuster documentary series: HBO's *The Vow* and Starz's *Seduced*.

influence as it insinuated itself into local, state, and national politics. In the 1970s, a critically bipartisan and interfaith coalition joined in the struggle to curb NRM activity. Politically active NRMs also came from across the left/right spectrum. Republican Bob Dole became the greatest adversary of the rightwing Unification Church, while Democrat Leo Ryan famously investigated the leftwing Peoples Temple and its well-connected leader, Jim Jones. But even if its players came from across the spectrum, the cult wars were always political. The stakes for both sides involved questions of religious freedom, free will, the role of family, and the preservation of American democracy.

After Jonestown in 1978, which coincided with the rise of a newly vocal and visible Christian right, the cult wars turned partisan. The bipartisan ACM had always participated in the ultimately conservative project of narrowing the acceptable range of religion and family structures. This allowed for questions raised in the 1970s—what was a religion? What was a family?—to be answered in narrow, conservative terms in the new political context of 1980s. The death of the leftwing Peoples Temple at Jonestown, and the debates around religious freedom that it generated, proved critical for this process. Jonestown left an opening for the Unification Church to make a successful claim to legitimate churchdom as well as to align itself politically with the anticommunist, pro-family agenda of the Republican Party. Conservatives also used Jonestown as a foil to narrowly prescribe which religious groups could be a part of their coalition, thus tarring politically left, countercultural, and transgressive alternative religions as violent by association. This did important work in the broader context of the 1980s culture wars, in which conservatives fought against a progressive vision of America that had become increasingly mainstream since the 1960s. These wars were waged on a variety of terrains—from textbooks to abortion rights to heavy metal music to multiculturalism—but each entailed a struggle between two diametrically opposed worldviews, each of which sought to define American values and culture. To paraphrase scholar Andrew Hartman, the culture wars constituted a struggle for the very soul of America. I focus specifically on the elements of the culture wars involving popular culture, religion, and family values. I argue that by the 1980s, the culture wars deployed the language of the cult wars by promoting normative ideas of religion and family, emphasizing the threat alternative groups and subcultures posed to children, and amplifying the idea that a culture of permissive secularism endangered the family itself. In this sense, more than existing as one among many different arenas for culture wars, the cult wars produced the very terms for debate.

In 2004, historian Jon Butler famously argued against what he called the "jack-in-the-box" theory of American religion, wherein religion pops up when convenient to the overall narrative rather than play a formative role in the history we tell.[10] Butler's gloss of the post-World War II narrative suggested that religion, and religious pluralism, became increasingly more important in the context of the Cold War and the fight against the godless Soviets in the 1950s. Then, in the 1950s and 1960s, Black Protestant Christianity became the most lasting, and perhaps the most significant, expression of domestic religious politics. The Democratic Party, long haunted by its schizophrenic "Faustian bargain" between southern racists, African Americans, and white racial liberals, eventually subscribed to this vision of racial equality,

[10] Jon Butler, "Jack-in-the-Box Faith: The Religion Problem in Modern American History," *The Journal of American History* 90, no. 4 (2004): 1359.

crafted and led by Black religious leaders like Martin Luther King Jr.[11] After the mid-1960s, however, the story seemed to become more secular, as religion was overshadowed by the feminist movement, black power, deindustrialization, and the horrors of Vietnam. These realities, understood in largely secular terms, tore American society asunder, fracturing the nation. According to this narrative, Jerry Falwell and other religious conservatives saw the political and spiritual dissatisfaction of the American people and sprang into action, mobilizing around what are now familiar causes for neo-fundamentalists like abortion and taxes. This understanding has relied heavily on the "backlash" theory, wherein the culture changes of the 1960s and 1970s led to a strong, merciless response from religious conservatives—Catholics and evangelical Protestants—who had been waiting in the wings.[12]

Since Butler pointed this out in 2004, there has been a spate of important writing on the subject of modern American religious history, and more recently, scholars of the benighted 1970s have given religion its due. On the subject of evangelicalism, historians like Matthew Sutton have pointed out the much longer history of their political and worldly aims. Groundbreaking, original work like Axel Schaefer's *Countercultural Conservatives* and David Swartz's *Moral Minority* have questioned the obviousness of evangelical conservativism and stressed the contingency of the Christian Right's right-ness.[13] Studies of conservative mobilization highlight how, as they railed against secular modernity, evangelical activists were essentially modern in their tactics.

Evangelicals did not act alone, and while other scholars have explored the importance of different religious groups banding together for common causes, they rarely note fringe groups in their analysis.[14] My work, however, does more than correct an oversight by way of addition, especially in the crucial history on the culture wars. The stakes of these wars were nothing less than which vision of American identity should prevail: the increasingly secular, permissive, and inclusive version promoted by the left, or the narrower one located in a sense of traditional,

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[11] For more on the complex political coalition that made up the Democratic Party in the mid-twentieth century, especially between Southern Democrats and liberal northerners, see Part II, "Southern Cage" in Ira Katznelson, *Fear Itself: The New Deal and the Origins of Our Time*, First edition. (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2013).

[12] Classic, sweeping accounts of the rise of the Christian Right include: William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right In America*, 1st ed (New York: Broadway Books, 1996); Frances FitzGerald, *The Evangelicals: The Struggle to Shape America*, First Simon & Schuster hardcover edition. (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2017); Randall Herbert Balmer, *Mine Eyes Have Seen the Glory: A Journey into the Evangelical Subculture in America*, 25th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[13] See Axel R. Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives: American Evangelicalism from the Postwar Revival to the New Christian Right*, Studies in American Thought and Culture (Madison : The University of Wisconsin Press, c2011; David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism*, reprint edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). More recent work on evangelicalism which has tried to complicate the backlash thesis includes: Matthew Avery Sutton, *American Apocalypse: A History of Modern Evangelicalism*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Massachusetts London, England: Belknap Press: An Imprint of Harvard University Press, 2017); Molly Worthen, *Apostles of Reason: The Crisis of Authority in American Evangelicalism* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[14] There is a robust scholarship on persistent but uneven efforts to promote interfaith collaboration, both for liberal and conservative projects. See: Neil J. Young, *We Gather Together: The Religious Right and the Problem of Interfaith Politics* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199738984.001.0001; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford University Press, 2011); K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2019).

Christian values proposed by the right. The phrase was first coined by sociologist James Davison Hunter in 1992 to refer to a series of "hot button issues" that divided Americans along stark lines, reflecting a polarized nation that fundamentally differed on what direction was best for the future of the United States.[15] In *A War for the Soul of America*, Andrew Hartman adheres to the backlash theory, arguing that the culture wars were the struggles fought on the terrain won by the liberal/left in the 1960s, including in education and popular culture.[16] I agree with Hartman's stress on the capaciousness of the culture wars—and that they manifested in an astonishing array of sites, including high and lowbrow culture, textbooks, debates around gay rights and families, affirmative action, just to name a few. While religion figures into his analysis, mostly in the form of the religious conservatives who propagated the culture wars, cults/NRMs remain ignored even though the cult wars paved the way for the debates of the culture wars. The cult wars were always about parents and children, as parents made claims over the autonomy of their adult children who had chosen to join NRMs. These claims relied on the blurred lines between child as an age category (being under 18) and child as a relational category (offspring). After Jonestown, pre-existing parental concerns reinforced a wider cultural impression that alternative religions, especially those associated with the left, were destructive, capable of violence, and perhaps evil. By the 1980s, the cult wars thus bolstered conservative claims that permissive, nontraditional aspects of culture endangered children and the family. At the same time, the success of the Unification Church shows that what churches were allowed into the conservative Christian fold did not merely narrow. Politics, not strict adherence to religious or cultural orthodoxy, mattered most.

My work centers the family, and offers fresh analysis of the emergence of family values as a salient political concept deployed especially effectively by Christian conservatives in the 1970s. Matt Lassiter has argued that the rise of family values as a powerful tool of the religious right reflects not only the triumph of conservatives over liberals in the "electoral arena, but that cultural explanations triumphed over economic ones" in terms of setting the terms of public debate over what ailed the American family.[17] Natasha Zaretsky similarly argues that amid a sea of wrenching cultural but also *economic* change, Americans tended to funnel anxieties into fears over the decline of the American family, rather than engage more holistically with American decline.[18] This approach logically led to solutions that resided in culture, rather than demands for largescale economic change. The culture wars, then, become the logical outcome of anxieties over family.

As Robert Self notes in his sweeping account of political and social transformation since the 1960s, "Americans rarely fought about equality, power, and money without invoking one idealized version of family or another."[19] The same might be said about the cult wars, in which conflicts over religious and political difference, national identity, and freedom itself were worked out through crucial questions about what families should look like and what rights biological

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[15] James Davison Hunter, *Culture Wars: The Struggle To Control The Family, Art, Education, Law, And Politics In America*, Reprint edition (Memphis, Tenn.: Basic Books, 1992).
[16] Andrew Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America: A History of the Culture Wars* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2015), 6.
[17] Matthew Lassiter, "Inventing Family Values" in Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds., *Rightward Bound: Making America Conservative in the 1970s* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2008), 16.
[18] Natasha Zaretsky, *No Direction Home : The American Family and the Fear of National Decline, 1968-1980* (Chapel Hill : University of North Carolina Press, c2007), 10.
[19] Robert O. Self, *All in the Family: The Realignment of American Democracy since the 1960s* (New York : Hill and Wang, 2012), 6.

relatives should have with regard to each other's religious and personal choices. Melinda Cooper's recent book *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* likewise locates the family at the nexus of economic and social transformation.[20] Self's work, as well as other prominent studies about families and family values, emphasize the sexual and gender dimensions of family values as constituted by conservatives. Seth Dowland's *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right* argues that family values "created a bond between evangelicalism and political conservatism" and as such is the key to understanding the formation and ascent of the Christian Right in the 1970s and 1980s.[21] Similarly, Recent books like R. Marie Griffith's *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* and Megan Goodwin's *Abusing Religion* have emphasized the deeply laid anxieties over sex among conservatives of faith as a driving force in religious politics.[22] Goodwin's book, unlike Griffith's, centers fringe religions in her analysis and in doing so emphasizes that accusations of sexual impropriety, especially toward white women and children, are unfairly leveled at minority religions. Not only is this unfair to members of those faiths, but it deflects from the much more common and pervasive problem of abuse within traditional families and communities by trusted adults, like relatives, family priests and religious leaders, coaches, and teachers.[23]

These works all help contextualize but by and large—with the exceptions of Zaretsky and Goodwin—they are limited in their focus on evangelicals, or conservative Christians generally. Partly, this stems from the tendency to emphasize the ways in which family values and the culture wars were the product of backlash against the cultural changes of the 1960s, especially in the realms of gender and sexuality. While the Christian Right remains central in my research, as does the notion of backlash, overemphasis on this narrative leads to shortcomings. For instance, it tends to gloss over the deeply bipartisan nature of familial concerns in the 1970s which in many ways stemmed both in form and substance from the hegemonic Cold War era of the 1950s and early 1960s as much as they presaged the polarized world of the 1980s.

In the cult wars, debates over religious difference—what religions were within the pale of a coalition like the religious right, or the center left, and what was the delineation?—represented a continuation of Cold War-era fears of brainwashing, totalitarianism, and other anxieties that were both local and global. It is thus important to consider these larger geopolitical—in addition to more domestic social and sexual—concerns. While anticommunism would become a squarely Republican cause by the 1980s, in the 1950s concerns over communism were shared broadly by liberals and conservatives alike, though of course the fervency and tenor of those fears were not monolithic. Incorporating the cult wars into this history allows us to see that the formation of family values, and the safety and wellbeing of young people, was a joint effort between liberals and conservatives, reform rabbis and fundamentalist ministers, and other unlikely collaborators into the 1980s. Defense of the family was always deeply intertwined with fears over reproduction, sexuality, and changing gender roles. But to reduce these politically to sites of

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[20] Melinda Cooper, *Family Values: Between Neoliberalism and the New Social Conservatism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017), 22.
[21] Seth Dowland, *Family Values and the Rise of the Christian Right*, Politics and Culture in Modern America (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 2.
[22] Megan Goodwin, *Abusing Religion: Literary Persecution, Sex Scandals, and American Minority Religions* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020); R. Marie Griffith, *Moral Combat: How Sex Divided American Christians and Fractured American Politics* (New York: Basic Books, 2017).
[23] Goodwin, *Abusing Religion,* 1-3.

conservative hysteria both overstates their singular importance and ignores broader-based fears that fed into the culture wars.

Another major contribution of my work is to center the fringe in American political and religious history. Historians on the whole have simply not paid adequate attention to NRMs' role in politics and culture. In part, a lack of attention to NRMs has stemmed from a tendency among historians to not view these groups as particularly religious; thus, much work that has taken them seriously on their own ideological and theological terms has come from scholars in various other fields, especially religious studies but also in sociology and American studies.[24] Scholars including Dick Anthony, Eileen Barker, David Bromley, George Chryssides, Eugene Gallagher, Massimo Introvigne, James Lewis, Philip Jenkins, Gordon Melton, Rebecca Moore, Susan Palmer, James Richardson, Thomas Robbins, Anson Shupe, Benjamin Zeller and others have demonstrated that NRMs are not composed mainly of vulnerable dupes or social outcasts. Rather, they have argued that these groups are deserving of analysis in their own right and on their own terms. Indeed, a main thrust of this literature has been the notion that "cult" is not a term with a tight sociological definition, but rather refers to a group's orientation to the mainstream. To paraphrase an oft repeated maxim in NRM studies, a cult is merely a religion people don't like. I respect and follow these scholars in their sensitive treatment of groups on their own terms; I seek to build on their work in new directions by integrating NRMs into the political and religious history of the US, and viewing them as actors who operate under political constraints and with visions of political possibilities.

Through five chapters, I tell the story of the cult phenomenon through the eyes of elected officials and NRM members, parents and faith leaders, journalists and academics. I examine how the cult wars which began in the 1970s helped produce the culture wars by setting new terms of debate around questions of family, faith, children, and the incursion of unwanted and even dangerous religious and cultural influences. Partly, this was due to the perception that cults had the potential to drive a wedge between religion and the family by demanding that converts choose between their families of origin and their newfound faith. Historians such as Rebecca Davis and others have shown that conversion had long been a hallmark of American life, as have fears of destructive religions insinuating themselves into American society.[25] In the 1970s anxieties about conversion took on a specific character, as wider concerns over intergenerational strife, social change, and political radicalism produced a moral panic around cults with seemingly existential stakes. Families of NRM members took to both courthouses and courts of public opinion to claim that their loved ones were not genuine converts, but were brainwashed, or mentally ill, and thus needed to be under the conservatorship and care of their families of

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[24] For some examples, see Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie: Choice or Brainwashing?* (Oxford ; New York, NY, USA: B. Blackwell, 1984); David G. Bromley, *Moonies in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade*, Sage Library of Social Research ; v. 92 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979); David G. Bromley and Anson D. Shupe, *Strange Gods: The Great American Cult Scare* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1981); David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*, Acls Humanities E-Book (Indiana University Press, 2003); Douglas E. Cowan and David G. Bromley, *Cults and New Religions : A Brief History*., Wiley Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series (Chichester, West Sussex ; Malden, MA: Wiley Blackwell, 2015.)

[25] For interesting treatments of conversion in the United States, see Robert D. Putnam and David E. Campbell, *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us*, 1st Simon & Schuster hardcover ed. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010); Lincoln A. Mullen, *The Chance of Salvation: A History of Conversion in America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017); Davis, *Public Confessions: The Religious Conversions That Changed American Politics* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021).

origin. They argued that family, and natal religious community, was at the core of American life and society; these cults were merely monstrous approximation of family and faith. NRM members and leaders argued on the other hand that this was a matter of religious freedom, among the most sacred rights of Americans.

Chapter one introduces several of the key players in the cult scare of the 1970s. The Unification Church (UC) arrived in the US as a missionary movement, fatefully allied with the embattled president Richard Nixon, and became the center of the cult scare. This was the result of a concerted effort by the burgeoning ACM and their political allies, most centrally Kansas Senator Robert Dole. With Dole as central protagonist, the chapter traces government efforts to address concerns over cults, especially the Unification Church, before Jonestown. Critically, this early incarnation of the cult wars forced a reckoning with key questions about what constituted legitimate faith and the role of families of origin in matter of religion and politics. These debates were political from the start, but they were not yet partisan.

Chapter two offers a case study in Jewish anticult activity, demonstrating that 'the family' as a motivating cause was not merely the purview of the Christian right. It was also critically important for civil-rights-minded Reform Jews who mobilized rhetoric about totalitarianism, child welfare, and Jewish survival to counter the cults. I use the example of (mostly) Reform rabbis to explore the interfaith, bipartisan, and family-oriented politics of the cult scare. This chapter also demonstrates how the cult wars acted as a link between the Cold War and the culture wars by combining Cold War concerns over brainwashing and antidemocratic incursion with those about secularization and the decline of the family in an increasingly permissive post-1960s society.

Chapter three switches focus to Jim Jones and Peoples Temple and their ascent to great heights in the left/liberal political world of the 1970s, examining this story as a prime example of how the fringe in fact could be at the center of American religion and politics. I argue that using this period of San Francisco history helps us better understand the Democrats' negotiation of powerful forces within the party, namely African-American Church traditions, the post-Vietnam left, and the rise of the New Democrats, at a critical juncture. Locating Peoples Temple within the social, political, religious, and cultural milieu of the Bay Area of the 1970s also helps reveal the wider political stakes of responses to Jonestown. Finally, this chapter offers a parallel to the story of Bob Dole and the Unification Church taken up in chapter one, and helps show that while politics were always critical in reactions to NRMs, these politics did not begin with a partisan valence. Leo Ryan, a maverick Democrat from South San Francisco, rose as the strongest political adversary of Jones and his supporters. Ryan and Dole publicly took on NRMs whose politics, broadly speaking, mirrored those of their own parties, rather than using the cult wars as a tool of partisan advancement.

The fourth chapter examines the mass-death event at Jonestown as a key turning point in the transition from cult wars to culture wars, as arguments about the defense of the family bucked up against religious freedom claims. Longtime adversaries of NRMs like Bob Dole made a last bid to make the cult issue a national one in defense of the family and traditional values. While anticultists were convinced that this was the moment the government would finally intervene against cults, the political will was not there, as the Unification Church mounted a successful defense that government intervention was too high a price to pay. NRM allies, as well as mainstream religious groups, sided with them in this cause and that of religious freedom more broadly. This moment created an opening for the Unification Church to position itself as a persecuted religion and foreclosed the possibility of government action against NRMs. Further, it

dovetailed with the ascending religious right, for whom government interference in religious affairs acted as a central site of mobilization.

Jonestown had two contradictory effects: it allowed for some NRMs (like the UC) to argue for legitimate churchdom, but it also bolstered fears that nonnormative religions which strayed from conservative religious and political norms were capable of violence and destruction. Chapter five finds the Unification Church ascending to astonishing heights in the Republican Party in the 1980s, while Peoples Temple had become symbolic of the dangers of alternative religion, tarring all progressive and transgressive NRMs by association. In this period, the culture wars rose to a fever pitch, with Jonestown confirming the worst fears of parents around cultic recruitment and the occult. At the same time, Reverend Moon's 1983 imprisonment for tax fraud might have satisfied Bob Dole, but went against larger tides within the conservative Christian coalition. He thus became a martyr for religious freedom upon his release in 1985. The UC abandoned any effort to fit in with the alternative NRM ethos it had sought in the 1960s, and emphasized their long history of anti-communist and pro-family stances. While after Jonestown, opponents of NRMs initially deployed a defense of the family to advocate for harsher policies around cults, in the end the Unification Church was able to successfully argue for itself as not only a victim of religious prosecution but also a defender of traditional family values. Changes within American conservatism in which religious freedom had become as important as normative Christian hegemony, as well as shared political goals, allowed for the UC to make a successful bid for inclusion into a conservative political/religious coalition, even as the cult wars in some ways reached their nadir with the Satanic Panic. This moral panic then was not only the result of conservative 1980s backlash, but was the logical conclusion of the cult wars, which had amplified fears of unfamiliar religions outside of Jewish and Christian traditions since the early 1970s. Ultimately, the rise of conservative Christian "family values" politics and the increasing emphasis on America's Judeo-Christian history/character for political purposes in the 1980s produced a narrow answer to broader questions raised during the cult wars of the 1970s.

Those on the margins explain the mainstream not because they express its most extreme impulses. Rather the fringe explains the center by probing its bounds, and by actively participating in the process of defining political and religious possibility. The important questions then are not about what makes a cult and cult, or whether or not a given group is intrinsically cult-y or not. Rather, they are about inclusion and exclusion, and how proximity to the center confers great privilege but has never been guaranteed. Peoples Temple and the Unification Church, as well as their opponents, created room for debate around some of the most fundamental elements of society—faith, family, and America itself—at the close of the 1960s, when the most familiar bedrocks of society seemed to be on the verge of collapse.

Chapter 1:
The Essence of Civilization: The Unification Church, Anticult Organizing, and a Struggle for the American Family

On March 24, 1977, California State Superior Court Judge S. Lee Vavuris ordered that five adult members of Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church be placed in temporary custody of their parents for 30 days. The church members, dubbed the "faithful five," contested their parents' efforts to gain custody, claiming that they were not brainwashed acolytes or mentally disturbed fanatics. Rather they insisted that were exercising the basic American right of the freedom to choose and practice their religion, promised to them by the First Amendment. The parents, on the other hand, argued that their loved ones had been mentally coerced by Moon and his followers, and that they were no longer capable of making sound decisions. These "Moonies," as Moon's followers were derisively called, needed to be deprogrammed—subjected to what critics of the practice considered reverse brainwashing to bring them back to normalcy after their cultic indoctrination.

Judge Varuvis surprised many observers when he sided with the parents. Conservatorship bids had worked occasionally in these sorts of cases before, but represented an increasingly tricky legal strategy. Historically, conservatorships were granted to relatives to protect the interests of an older loved one. In the mid-1970s, however, relatives of so-called "cult recruits" (who would have considered themselves converts) began to deploy this strategy to forcibly remove their kin from what they considered dangerous organizations. When describing his reasoning for granting the conservatorships, Judge Varuvis acknowledged that the decision would be challenged and set new precedent, but also insisted on the existential stakes: "We are talking about the essence of civilization—mother, father and children," he said. "There's nothing like it. I know of no greater love than parents for their children…The child is the child even though a parent may be 90 and the child 60."[26] The decision was quickly overturned on appeal, and the conservatorship strategy itself began to crumble. That said, Judge Varuvis spoke for many when he prioritized the claims of parents over those of new converts on their own religious autonomy.

One week earlier on March 18th, New York State Supreme Court Justice John J. Leahy had come to a very different conclusion. Calling the controversial Hare Krishna movement a "bona fide religion," he threw out specious claims of brainwashing within the organization. The Hare Krishnas had been indicted for false imprisonment and attempted extortion, but Leahy saw clearly that the members on whose behalf the case had been brought were there "voluntarily" and according to the tenets of their legitimately chosen religious beliefs.[27] Leahy dismissed charges of brainwashing and coercion, insisting that "the freedom of religion is not to be abridged

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[26] Les Ledbetter, "Parents Win Custody of 5 Members of Moon's Church," *The New York Times*, March 25, 1977.

[27] The International Society for Krishna Consciousness (ISKCON), more familiarly known as the Hare Krishna movement, was formed in 1966 by A.C. Bhaktivedanta Sami Prabhupada in New York City. An NRM with Hindu beliefs, it became popular in the United States amid a wave of interest in Eastern, and especially Indian, beliefs, culture, and practices. It's members are often known by their mostly shaved heads and brightly saffron-colored robes. Hare Krishna devotees populated many media pieces about NRMs because of their striking appearances, and came to represent novel Eastern/Hindu religious sects making headway in urban centers in the US. In the 1960s, several famous Americans became interested in the movement, including beat poet Alan Ginsburg and other members of the counterculture. For more on the Hare Krishnas and the counterculture of the 1960s, see E. Burke Rochford, "Aligning Hare Krishna: Political Activists, Hippies, and Hindus," *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions* 22, no. 1 (August 1, 2018): 34–58.

because it is unconventional in its beliefs and practices or because it is approved or disapproved by the main-stream of society or more conventional religion." In essence, where Judge Varuvis had argued for the parent/child relationship as the most critical basis of American society, Judge Leahy thought that religious freedom was an even more basic, inalienable right. "The entire and basic issue before this court," Leahy summarized, "is whether or not the two alleged victims in this case and the defendants will be allowed to practice the religion of their choice—and this must be answered with a resounding affirmative."[28]

These cases received national attention and crystallized several crucial questions raised by the "cult" phenomenon. What really was more important to American life: religious freedom or the integrity of the nuclear family? For alarmed parents and other observers, the attraction of NRMs threatened to cleave apart family and religion, two bedrocks of society that had been—or at least felt—inextricably intertwined. Revolutionary cultural changes swept through the nation in the 1960s, allowing for a novel level of choice in how one wanted to live, worship, and relate to their families of origin and to society. NRMs like the UC could be especially alarming to those resistant to change because they offered a choice of a new family and a new religion. Some parents supported their children's spiritual journeys. Many could not. Thus began a period of advocacy and an increasingly coordinated anticult and cult awareness movement (ACM.) The issue of the cults grew from one that might plague an individual family to one that rose to threaten American society itself.

As NRMs became the center of debate over the primacy of religion versus the family by the late 1970s, the Unification Church came to stand in as cult "public enemy number one," facing wide-ranging scrutiny for their leader's foreign origin as well as the perception that the group encouraged separation from families of origin.[29] UC members were the subjects of deprogrammings (forcible removals from NRMs, usually at the behest of concerned relatives) and conservatorship cases, but so were Hare Krishnas, members of the Children of God, and other NRM members. What distinguished the UC was that the group was singled out by Congress, in myriad ways, because of its political activities in addition to its "cult" status. Beginning as a small fringe movement with unconventional religious views, the UC was one among many such groups in the Bay Area and nation in the 1960s and 1970s. The group was also more politically conservative than its NRM peers—they strongly supported President Nixon and the war, while fiercely denouncing communism, pornography, and drug use. In this same period, Reverend Moon was given an audience by the president, and the group began to build up real political connections in Washington.

In addition to provoking debates over the centrality of family and religious freedom, the UC also generated controversy about the nature of religion itself. UC members loudly proclaimed themselves a persecuted religious minority while their detractors claimed that their main aims were political and financial, rather than religious, and as such they should not be afforded the privileges and protections offered to religious groups by the First Amendment. Republican Senator Robert J. Dole of Kansas took up this cause with singular energy, becoming the primary political figure in the cult drama as well at the Unification Church's most powerful antagonist. Dole chose the IRS and the group's tax-exempt status as the main tool in his arsenal for curbing their activities. The seemingly banal matter of taxation in fact became a proxy for fierce debates, within the Republican Party and across the political spectrum, about religious

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[28] Murray Schumach, "Judge Rejects Charges of 'Brainwashing' Against Hare Krishna Aides," *The New York Times*, March 18, 1977.

[29] Ted Patrick and Tom Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!*, 1st ed (New York: Dutton, 1976), 235.

freedom and the power of the state. Other politicians took notice of the Unification Church and the cults more broadly. They worked with the nascent ACM, as well as individual parents and their peers in government to transform individual concerns about "cult" recruitment into a national, political, and existential issue.

When the Unification Church arrived in the Bay Area and United States, it fit into the countercultural ethos common to NRMs in the turbulent 1960s and 1970s even while maintaining strongly conservative and anticommunist politics. The emergence of the ACM, as well as state-level and then congressional attention to the cult issue, politicized NRMs and turned the UC into an emblem for the dangers posed by cults. The emergence of this movement alongside the early activism of its most famous protagonist, Senator Bob Dole thrust NRMs onto the national stage, and made NRM conversion and recruitment a political issue. This led in 1977 to a major congressional investigation of the UC which promoted the idea that the group was foreign, politically motivated, and potentially dangerous. Questions of family, religious freedom, and political belonging, largely shaped by the legacies of the Cold War and Vietnam eras, came together in the mid- to late-1970s to produce a politicized and coherent cult scare, in which one exemplar fringe group, the Unification Church, prompted a larger cultural panic about the activities of cults/NRMS.

Organizing by the ACM combined with the increased visibility of NRMs created a media atmosphere that was generally hostile, and many Americans came to believe that these groups were a threat to family, religion, and the United States as a political entity. To defend themselves, NRMs wielded religious freedom claims, and thus a struggle emerged that pit the family against religion. Only one could be the "essence of civilization," to quote Judge Varuvis, and which side prevailed could have serious consequences for the ability of Americans to choose their own unpopular faiths, as well as for families of origin to intervene in what they saw as dangerous processes of radicalization. This new focus on parents, and on the battle between NRMs and families as a political issue, produced the first iteration of the cult wars as culture war as it cast traditional family values and religions as antithetical to the novel, countercultural, and transgressive choices newly available in the spiritual marketplace since the 1960s. At this point, though, the cult wars were political but they were not yet partisan. Democrats and Republicans united in their concern over NRM activity. If anything the wars divided along generational lines rather than partisan political ones. Indeed, NRMs never had the power to cleave apart religion and family. Rather, this moral panic provoked a massive backlash involving, parents, presidents, Congress, religious leaders, and an aggressive contingent of the media.

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In the 1960s, the Unification Church operated in relative obscurity. It fit quite seamlessly into the heady atmosphere of the Bay Area, appealing to the seekers and burgeoning counterculture and left political movements thriving at Berkeley and other campuses around the nation. But they already held the same conservative and anticommunist politics that would come to define them in the 1970s and 1980s. At the same time, they were not only a conservative movement—they proclaimed solidarity with racial and religious minorities and positioned themselves as fringe and antiestablishment. In other words, they adopted the language, style, and idealistic worldview of the New Left and counterculture, as well as some of its aims and politics, while also promoting anticommunism, supporting President Nixon, and emphasizing

conservative sexual mores.[30] In this sense, the UC—like the cult wars more broadly—were always political, but had not settled into a bounded, narrower, partisan formation.

Sun Myung Moon was born in north-west Korea on January 6, 1920. His family converted to Presbyterianism when he was ten years old, and he became deeply religious. He began having revelations when he was a teenager, but he did not systematically write down or begin preaching his theology until the 1950s. His revelations would become the *Divine Principle*, the foundational text of the Unification Church. He gained a small following in the late 1940s in North Korea, attracting the attention of the Communist government who imprisoned him and sentenced him to hard labor. He was liberated by UN forces in 1950 at the outset of the Korean War. Some observers cite this experience as the root of the fervent anticommunism that would largely define his movement's politics. Failing to gain acceptance from either mainstream or Christian groups in Korea, in 1954 Moon and his followers established the Holy Spirit Association for the Unification of World Christianity, the first incarnation of the Unification Church. He decided to bring his church to the West in 1959, where they continued to struggle for legitimacy and acceptance but did get some traction, especially on the West Coast.

The *Divine Principle* mixed Christian doctrine, East Asian belief systems, and Moon's own revelations about his status as messiah and mission on earth. An emphasis on parents, children, and the family relationship survived from Christianity and became central tenets of the *Divine Principle.* Moon was a prophet, sent to earth to fulfill Jesus's mission of unification: Jesus himself had died before he could marry, have children, and come into his role of True Father. Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han, were the True Parents of humanity, and their children were born without original sin. Their followers, blessed in marriage by matches Moon himself had made, were similarly perfect. World unification could be achieved when every couple, and every child born to them, were blessed in such a way. The emphasis on procreation and unification led the Unificationists to believe strongly in interracial and international marriages as a core means of achieving one unified world.[31]

Anticommunism, and the United States, figured prominently in Moon's revelations and mission. Unification could not be achieved until the biggest threat to humanity, communism, had been eliminated. America was the only country that could stand up to this threat, as it possessed the right ideals of freedom, unity, and diversity. "People of all the different races, colors and nationalities come to this country to make one great nation together," Reverend Moon told one audience of followers and members of Congress at one sermon on Capitol Hill in 1974. "Once America truly lives up to the motto of "one nation under God," then this will be the nation with the capacity and potential to influence the rest of the world, to bring the whole world together

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[30] The notion that politically or religiously conservative movements and groups in the 1960s and 1970s adopted the language and style of counterculture has produced an interesting literature. See especially: Schäfer, *Countercultural Conservatives,* and Preston Shires, *Hippies of the Religious Right: From the Counterculture of Jerry Garcia to the Subculture of Jerry Falwell* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2007).

[31] The *Divine Principle,* and Unification beliefs, constitute an immensely complex and multifaceted theological belief system. It is impossible to do justice to it here, and I am mainly pointing out some of the most relevant facets of their beliefs—namely, around the family and the world political order. For a more involved treatment of their theology and beliefs, see G. Chryssides, *The Advent of Sun Myung Moon: The Origins, Beliefs and Practices of the Unification Church* (Springer, 1991); Barker, *The Making of a Moonie*, 1984; and the Divine Principle itself, available online at: "Exposition of the Divine Principle - Hyo Won Eu - Reprinted 2006 in Color - TOC," accessed April 14, 2022, http://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Books/DP06/0-Toc.htm.

united under God."[32] Communism having been defeated and the United States victorious, the true work of unification could begin: Revered Moon would unite the world as leader and messiah.

Moon's movement arrived on America's shores more than a decade before Moon himself relocated. Two missionaries from Korea and Japan would have the strongest influence on the early development of the movement in the Bay Area and the West Coast of the US. Miss Kim, the first missionary in California, and Mr. Choi, who is given credit for turning the group into as much social movement as theological one. Miss Kim arrived in California in 1960 after some time at the movement's headquarters in Seoul and a brief stint in Washington State. The movement began with just six members in the Bay Area and was slow to grow. This early period in the 1960s is significant because while small, adherents rapidly attempted to integrate into the culture of the period, beginning to form the complex identity that would define the movement and confound its observers for years.

In earliest days of UC growth in the Bay Area, the movement's identity was somewhat inchoate. While the Unification Church has so often been represented in the media through the image of Reverend Moon, he would not visit the United States until 1965 nor move permanently until 1971. Thus the Unification movement in 1960s, while devoted to Moon's teaching and status as prophet, was far from run on a daily level under his centralized control. Different regional characters developed depending on leadership, and the movement was plagued by schisms. Bo Hi Pak, who would become Reverend Moon's closest advisor and translator, was busy forming ties in Washington DC through establishing the UC branch there. On the flip side, Miss Kim, Mr. Choi, and the other early recruits went to work spreading the Unification message to seekers in San Francisco and Berkeley. It was difficult to recruit members for several reasons, not least among them the fact that the *Divine Principle*, the movement's sacred text, had yet to be translated into English.[33] Miss Kim would complete this translation in 1972, giving the movement a whole new means of proselytization and devotional study.

In the early 1960s, the group experimented with various alliances and associations. They were generally met with less than enthusiastic responses when they attempted to proselytize in Christian spaces, though Christians had been their initial target for recruitment. While in later years they would insist that the UC was a strongly, and exclusively, Judeo-Christian movement, the group made several important overtures into the occult and spiritualist milieus in the Bay Area and beyond.[34] A cast of colorful characters quickly became interested in the message of Reverend Moon through Miss Kim's evangelistic efforts. One early associate, Emily Rathbun, understood herself as "the leader of a New Age in America and that her mission was to recruit 1000 American women."[35] The most significant associate was Sir Anthony Brooke, the leader of a British metaphysical group and the last of the "White Rajas."[36] Brooke promoted what he

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[32] Sun Myung Moon, "America in God's Providence," Sermon on Capitol Hill, October 8, 1974. Reproduced at Tparents.com: http://www.tparents.org/Moon-Books/GodProvAm-760000.pdf

[33] Michael L. Mickler, *A History of the Unification Church in America, 1959-1974* (New York: Garland, 1993). 8.

[34] The group's insistence that they shared "Judeo-Christian" roots and ethos with mainstream Christian groups ramped up after negative press in the wake of the Jonestown tragedy in 1978, and itself was a highly calculated political move. Scholars including Healen Gaston, in her book *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press: 2019), have shown that Judeo-Christian should be understood as a political and historically specific categorization, rather as a neutral sociological or religious one.

[35] Mickler, 25.

[36] Mickler, 64.

called "the Universal Link Revelation," and like Moon (and many other New Age spiritualists of this time) he emphasized interconnectedness in global consciousness. Brooke also provided the link between Moon and Arthur Ford, one of the most famous mediums in the country. Reverend Moon made a point to do a "sitting" with Ford when he visited the US in 1965, who foresaw great things in Moon's future.[37]

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement began to pick up steam as it changed. NRM scholars Anson Shupe and Dave Bromley attribute changing recruitment tactics and successes to several factors. One is that what success the UC did have in the 1960s was largely limited to young people interested in either spiritual enlightenment or social change, or some combination. They argue that the UC honed tactics that appealed to young people, and that as more and more of them moved from secular movements toward interest in spiritual ones by the start of the 1970s, the UC offered a natural home.[38]

In 1965, a second important missionary from East Asia, Mr. Choi, arrived in the Bay. He decided that young people were not interested enough in religion, and that religious people were not interested enough in change. He said in an interview with church member and historian Michael Mickler that "when I saw the hippie people I really hurt. Young men with long hair without any discipline or training, character education…So I thought I better contribute my life to the character education of life rather than religious life."[39] Thus began a shift in the UC from emphasis on *Divine Principle* as such toward Unification as a more capacious, rather than strictly theological, idea. The Re-Education center run by Choi and his group offered experimental classes and for a for rethinking society and how to improve it. While the group still followed the teachings of Reverend Moon, many of their approaches to outreach and activism had changed, fitting more easily in the milieu of student and youth culture in the 1960s.

In 1970s, Mr. Choi's group purchased land in Mendocino country with the intent of building a utopian community there. The International Ideal City was a grandiose plan that, like many such visions, never came fully to fruition. The Ideal City project was significant, however, for several reasons: first, it became a recruiting tactic in places like UC Berkeley's Sproul Plaza, where Unification missionaries would attract college students with the promise of the urban utopian experiment. Second, Booneville (where the land was located) may not have become the International Ideal City, but it did serve as an important site for weekend retreats and other introductory programming for new recruits. Many people in the Bay Area, whether they wound up joining the church or not, remember being invited to hear talks or go to dinner at a farm up in Booneville, just for the weekend, with likeminded young people.

One result of the church forming different wings simultaneously throughout the United States was that each took on unique, locally responsive characteristics. Attention to social causes and its presentation as a social movement, came to define the Oakland Family, the UC's Bay Area contingent. Even once Reverend Moon had arrived in the United States, this subset of the movement remained controversial partly because of the distance they kept from Reverend Moon

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[37] Mickler, 72.

[38] David G. Bromley, *Moonies in America: Cult, Church, and Crusade*, Sage Library of Social Research ; v. 92 (Beverly Hills: Sage Publications, 1979), 69. Several scholars, with varying degrees of distance from the NRM/CAM debate, have also written about the transformation from activist to spiritual seeker by many baby boomers in the 1970s. See also Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties : Moral Meaning in Conversion and Cultural Change* (Berkeley : University of California Press, c1982., 1982).; and Stephen A. Kent, *From Slogans to Mantras : Social Protest and Religious Conversion in the Late Vietnam War Era*, Religion and Politics (Syracuse, N.Y. : Syracuse University Press, 2001).

[39] Mickler, *A History of the Unification Church in America,* 106.

while recruiting. A hallmark of the Oakland Family was the energetic (or aggressive, depending on who you asked) ways in which they settled into the social and political milieu of the Bay Area. One tactic was thus to emphasize the group's alternative and eastern philosophies, spiritualism, and other elements that combined their longstanding interest in occultism with the political activism so popular among young people during the Vietnam War.

The UC sought to fit into the ethos of the Bay Area in the 1960s, adopting the language, style, and ideals of the counterculture and sometimes the New Left. One flyer for a "Free Communication Forum" talked in far-out terms about the interconnectedness of all living things, and the perennial search for the meaning of human life. It never named the group sponsoring the forum, or its purpose beyond bringing seekers together. The audience was clear: "we are drawn to all people," the flyer notes, "especially to hippies—who are tired of a materialistic society which is enslaved to money and machines. Therefore, we would like to have free forums with you about what true life is how we can establish a better society."[40] Another pamphlet, "Harmony as a Way of Life," similarly downplayed the religious aspects of the movement and referred to reverend Moon instead as a "contemporary Korean philosopher" ready to offer solutions to the ills of American society. The pamphlet beckoned the reader to join the Unified Family, "an interracial, intercultural, and international group of young people" who "are applying a universal philosophy of solving the basic problems of life."[41]

While many in the Unification movement found the leftism and anti-war activism of the New Left abhorrent, they nonetheless took direct cues from its most well-known organization, Students for a Democratic Society (SDS). In the late 1960s, UC members in Berkeley formed Students for an Ethical Society (SES), whose professed aim was to "mobilize students seeking to build a better world, and provide a forum for exploring common, universal principles that can solve existing conflicts and unify all aspects of human life including, politics, economics, science, religion, and culture."[42] They posed a duality between "Godism OR Materialism." Like SDS and many other New Left organizations, the UC side organizations from this period diagnosed a serious problem with society. Both groups believed people, and young people in particular, had become alienated from those parts of life that should provide meaning. They shared a suspicion of complacent materialism and turned to grassroots activism to promote their causes. They also targeted similar populations for recruitment.

According to members themselves, joining the Church offered a solution to a crisis of identity that was much wider spread among their age cohort. One of the most valuable data sets we have on their perspectives comes from a study conducted by J. Stillson Judah. Judah spent most of his career as a librarian at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley California, as well as a professor of religion there. He was among a cohort of religion scholars who pioneered NRM studies in the 1970s; they were a critical bloc on the pro-NRM side of the cult wars. Like many others in this milieu, Judah was a strong advocate for religious freedom, serving as the Vice President of the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty (APRL). APRL included membership from a variety of scholars, and it would play a significant role in defending NRMs from the ACM as conflict intensified. Judah published one of the first studies devoted to the

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[40] Free Communication Forum Flyer, ND (pre-1970), box 38, folder 17, Unification Church Vertical File, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.
[41] "Harmony is a Way of Life" pamphlet, box 38, folder 18, Unification Church Vertical File, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.
[42] SES Flier, ND (pre-1970), Box 38, folder 17, Unification Church Vertical File, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

Hare Krishnas, in which he was especially interested in their relationship to the broader counterculture.

After his retirement from the GTU in 1976, Judah conducted a large-scale study on attitudinal changes among UC recruits. Both his study and his data provide an invaluable glimpse into both the demographics and the internal lives of early movement recruits. Since Judah was based in the Bay Area himself, his results are especially illuminating in a study of the local Unification Church. Judah found that the majority of recruits joined the organization between the ages of 22 and 26, with the highest number of these joining at 22. Most were white and came from Christian backgrounds.[43] Many had been involved in the counterculture in various ways. One member spoke about his conversion in a way that echoed Mr. Choi: "Since being in the Church, my personality has rounded out from a passive radical rock and roll hippie to a person with care, love and hope for humanity, willing to sacrifice my life and pleasure for the betterment of mankind."[44] Seventy six percent of UC members surveyed were marijuana users before joining the movement, and 35% were at least occasional LSD users. Many remembered having deeply moving spiritual experiences while using drugs: one member noted that in particular LSD helped her "perceive the spiritual nature of the universe" and that it allowed her to "communicate with the spiritual world, especially great religious leader of the past, such as Buddha and Jesus." In spite of these experiences, they did not "bring me closer to god" and thus she stopped using drugs and continued to search for a spiritual home, which she found in the Unification Church.[45]

The UC, in other, words, was not many members first experiment in the 1960s. This era provided fertile ground for NRMs, and saw membership spike as young people looked for that new future. The Baby Boom of the post-World War II period created a new market of consumers of popular culture. As this generation entered their late teens and twenties, they also constituted a new market for spiritual practices. This numerically large cohort combined with a characteristic '60s ethos of experimentation meant that more than ever before, young people sought novel religious experiences and communities. Many young people, like the woman quoted in Judah's study, tried drugs in order to understand themselves and the universe more clearly; others sought out meaning through political activism and community efforts. Many NRMs and spiritual leaders heeded the call: gurus, preachers, and guides of many different stripes met the newly amplified demand for spiritual awakening. Whether it was through Hindu and Buddhist offshoots, popularized for instance by the Beatles' involvement with Maharishi Mahesh Yogi and his Transcendental Meditation, or sects fashioning themselves as hippied-out early Christians, or another variety of religious tradition, many people experimented with religious practice and belief. It is notoriously difficult to assess in firm numbers how many people joined NRMs in the 1960s and 1970s, but scholar J. Gordon Melton has estimated the number to be somewhere between 150,000-300,000. Another study from the late 1970s estimated that there were 500 individual groups operating in the United States as of the late 1970s.[46] The loose estimates and

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[43] J. Stillson Judah, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church," 1977, conference paper presented at Conference of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, pages 4-5, Box 38, folder 17, Unification Church Vertical File, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

[44] Judah paper, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church," 6.

[45] J. Stillson Judah, Questionnaires pt. 3, Box 10, folder 4, J. Stillson Judah: New Religious Movements Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

[46] For an in depth discussion on numbers and estimates of membership, see Philip Jenkins, *Mystics and Messiahs: Cults and New Religions in American History* (Oxford ; New York : Oxford University Press, 2000), 181–84.

wide range makes it hard to make solid claims about statistics, but the fact remains that even the most liberal estimates pale in comparison to rates offered by either the ACM.

That the UC made such an effort to embed itself in this milieu speaks to its pervasiveness in the culture of the Bay Area and beyond. It also speaks to larger trends of activism, protest, and alienation that often translated into intergenerational conflict.[47] These trends did not only impact those coming of age in the 1960s, but their families. Intergenerational disconnect and a sense of rupture spread throughout the United States as protests and political activism, as well as a rejection of conservative cultural mores, became more popular. It is in this context that young people joined the UC as well as other political, social, and religious movements. Ultimately, the joining of NRMs/cult phenomenon begged the question of which bedrock of society—family or religion, usually so intertwined—deserved primacy, because it translated the intergenerational strife into religious terms.

The sense that the American family was at risk, and that this presented problems for American society as a whole, was not new nor unique to the cult issue. Elaine Tyler May's groundbreaking *Homeward Bound* discusses the centrality of family to national security and nothing less than the success of the American project. In her story, the containment of communism in the 1950s began at home.[48] Similarly, in the 1960s and 1970s many families struggled with the fact that their children were rejecting the Cold War-era values so carefully inculcated in the home, the moral and religious center. For the family to defend the nation against communism, there needed to be a model for the ideal American family. Indeed, as the 1960s and 1970s seemed to descend into chaos, many Americans evoked the 1950s and before as a time of peace, conformity, and traditional values. Stephanie Coontz has famously shown that this idealized version of the American family is itself a myth, captured in her book's title, *The Way We Never Were.*[49]

No matter how based in reality this idealized family might have been, Natasha Zaretsky has masterfully shown that the decline of the American family was itself the primary signifier for broader anxieties over national decline in the 1970s. She argues that handwringing often "came down to one question: was the family disappearing?"[50] For many experts, this disappearance was due to nebulous but insidious changes in economics, in labor, in sexual mores, in law. Women were working outside the home in greater numbers; the alluring but stifling cultural illusion of the perfect nuclear family was becoming harder to achieve as expectations and opportunities changed. Changes in capitalism, in politics, and in sensibilities critically reshaped people's lives and futures and, of course, their families. In a time of great churn, people did the best they could to live their most authentic lives and to protect the things dearest to them. For many young people, this meant experimenting with novel political and religious identities.

While some in the ACM tried to depict recruits as brainwashed, or uncaring about the anguish of their families of origin, in fact feelings around family for UC members represented an especially complicated, and at times painful, element of group membership. It is perhaps ironic on some level that a majority of UC members became more strongly in favor of parental

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[47] For more on NRM conversion, intergenerational strife, and counterculture, see Steven M. Tipton, *Getting Saved from the Sixties,* 25–27.

[48] See Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*, 4th edition (New York: Basic Books, 2017).

[49] See Stephanie Coontz, *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (New York, NY: BasicBooks, 1992).

[50] Zaretsky, *No Direction Home,* 10.

authority upon joining the Church.[51] These results beg the question of *which* parents they meant. True Parenthood is among the most critical tenets of the Divine Principle, in which Reverend Moon and his wife were the True Mother and Father of Humanity. Parenthood and nuclear family were likewise essential to members, who were matched in marriage by Reverend Moon and for whom having and raising children in the movement became the central mission. At the same time, the most adamant critics of the UC were parents of people in the movement, and their surrogates. Many members wrote sensitively about their relationships with their own parents in Judah's study, speaking about how close they were in spite of political or religious differences.[52] Others wrote about the strain their joining the movement had caused, and regretted that their family members couldn't see the truth of the Divine Principle, or at least the positive change felt by their loved one because of Reverend Moon.

Family was not only at the center of the *Divine Principle,* but defined daily life in the group before the True Father ever set foot in the United States. Many NRMs considered themselves families, refashioning the concept in a way that was transgressive and meaningful. Many NRMs sought to recreate, or reinvent, family structures within their movements. Group leaders would commonly be known as "father" or "mother," and members referred to each other as brother and sister. Followers referred to David Berg of the Children of God, for instance, as Father (Children is even in the group's name, after all), and Jim Jones, for instance, was called "dad" by most Peoples Temple members regardless of their age or relationship to him. Many group members saw this as the enactment of a chosen family and a fulfillment of their own personal aims. The UC had its own version of this, which took especially well in the Bay Area. Among Mr. Choi's other innovations in the Bay Area was to solidify the concept of a "family" as an explicit styling for the communalism of the group. His group was multigenerational from its beginning in 1965, and they lived together in a home that mimicked an extended family, with a "mama-san" (mother figure) and a "papa-san" (Mr. Choi, the father figure.) This would become especially important as many UC recruits became estranged from their homes and families, seeking surrogate familial arrangements within the movement. Young people sought new forms of kinship and understanding beyond, and sometimes at the exclusion of, their families of origin. This fit with the beliefs of the group, which centered on Reverend Moon as the "true father" of humanity, and his wife Hak Ja Han Moon as the "true mother."

Their families of origin, however, often saw this practice as dangerous, alienating, and unnatural. Memoirs of those involved in the family-centric anticult movement are replete with rescue narratives about "getting my daughter back" or "saving my family from a dangerous cult."[53] The mobilization of biological families around the cause of rescuing, extracting, or kidnapping (depending on who you ask), is in large part responsible for the involvement of politicians in the 1970s, which led to the politicization of the cult/NRM phenomenon itself. These families often decided that the person making this decision was not their child at all but a voice, internal or external, forcing them against their will into estrangement.

The cult phenomenon embodied so many of these fears, giving parents an enemy in the struggle for their children's future. This is not to say that all families who had contact with an

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[51] Judah paper, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church," 24.

[52] J. Stillson Judah, Questionnaires pt. 2, Box 10, folder 4, J. Stillson Judah: New Religious Movements Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.

[53] Some even evoke this theme in their titles or subtitles, such as Barbara and Betty Underwood, *Hostage to Heaven: Four Years in the Unification Church by an Ex-Moonie and the Mother Who Fought to Free Her* (Potter, New York: 1979).

NRM reacted uniformly. To the contrary: the archive is replete with stories of supportive families who stayed together, accepting a bit more religious and cultural diversity than they had previously known. But this narrative did not take hold in the media, which salivated over stories of brainwashing, kidnapping, and the destruction of nice families by cults. Nor did it spawn a cottage industry of crusaders who would, usually for a price, attempt to free NRM recruits and their families from a cult leader's clutches. Stories that exposed, or amplified, the dark side of NRM conversion gained an outsized influence precisely because they spoke to the fears of those who never had contact with an NRM. The stories contained themes not only of family discord, but of foreign incursion by communists or totalitarians, of Satanist machinations, of novel sexual relationships, of racial mixing, of political radicalism. Genuine anguish within specific families symbolized anxieties about the future from which no Americans would be safe.

Ted Patrick believed cult members numbered in the millions, and he made a career out of publicizing the cult threat and working with parents to extract their children from NRMs. also known as Black Lightning, Patrick would become the "father of deprogramming" and the nation's most infamous cult-fighter. He also is remembered as among the most colorful and controversial characters of the cult phenomenon, which is no small feat. Patrick's enemies called him reckless, a zealot and a charlatan with no regard for human or civil rights. His admirers and clients thought him a fearless crusader who would stop at nothing to thwart a threat so great that the law had to be treated as a guideline, ill-equipped as it was to deal with the new cults. Patrick's extraordinary commitment to the cult threat and his own extreme methods of countering it landed him in jail on multiple occasions. Kidnapping charges and the ire of NRMs everywhere could not deter Black Lightning. By his semi-retirement in the 1990s Ted Patrick had attempted hundreds of deprogrammings. His success rate in extracting NRM converts, like so many other statistics in the cult phenomenon, depends tremendously on who you ask. At the very least, Patrick was an instrumental force in transforming concerns about cults from internal family dramas into a national movement in defense of the family itself.

His ferocious, uncompromising disdain for religious swindlers had deep roots in his upbringing. Theodore Roosevelt Patrick was born in 1930 to a poor Black family in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Patrick never forgot seeing preachers like Daddy Grace and others come to town, take people's money with promises of health, good fortune, and grace, and leave.[54] He was fond of telling one story about how his mother put a significant sum of the family money into faith healers to fix young Ted's speech impediment, only for him to correct it himself through sheer will. This was Patrick's way—while others waited on institutions (religious, governmental, or other) to fix things, he took things into his own hands.[55] In the 1960s, he claimed, the phony spiritual leaders that had long plagued Black communities finally came for white kids, leaving Patrick in a unique position to help confused white middle-class parents.

He succeeded in becoming the face of the deprogramming and even the anticult movement, a fate he could have scarcely predicted on a fateful, hot Fourth of July in 1971. That weekend Patrick and his family had rented a room at the Bahia Resort by Mission Beach in San

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[54] Charles Manuel Grace, known as Daddy or Sweet Daddy Grace, founded the predominantly African-American United House of Prayer for all People in 1919. For several decades, Grace would travel around preaching and recruiting for his movement, which involved hallmarks of Pentecostal Christianity like faith healing. Grace centered himself as the head of the movement, claiming that the Bible supported the notion that God chose one man to work through at a given time.

[55] Florence Conway and Jim Siegelman, Interview with Ted Patrick, *Playboy Magazine*, March 1979, 77-78.

Diego. Patrick worked at the time as a Special Representative for Community Relations in San Diego through Governor Reagan's office. According to Patrick's 1976 memoir, *Let Our Children Go!*, the weekend began as any other, until his son Michael and a nephew returned to the family after a day at the beach, acting strangely. Michael seemed especially out of sorts, "spacey," as Patrick put it. His nephew reported that they'd been approached on the boardwalk by a group of young people with "bibles and guitars"[56] who said they were members of a "family" called the Children of God.[57] Patrick and his wife considered contacting the authorities about the incident, in case it was some sort of communist plot, but ultimately decided to let the matter rest. A week or so later, though, Patrick was contacted by a woman, beside herself with worry, whose son had been "taken" by COG.

Patrick decided he should see for himself what the group was about, and he went undercover as a recruit. His memoir describes a dramatic few days, where he witnessed brain-washings, proclamations including "your parents are the enemy!," and attempts to wrest financial, mental, social, and spiritual autonomy from young members and recruits.[58] Patrick emerged from the experience as "Lazarus," swearing he'd seen hell and that he would rescue as many lost souls as he could from the "Kingdom of the Dead."[59] Thus began his career as a professional enemy of the cults, as he became a point of contact for more and more distressed parents looking for a sympathetic ear and a means of extracting their children from NRMs. Patrick offered both. He confirmed that he had seen the cults up close, and that the parents' worst fears were indeed reality. He might be their last hope. His distaste for false prophets might have begun early in his life, but Patrick's story about Michael is pinpointed, in his memoir and elsewhere, as the moment where he became aware of the cult threat and resolved to do something about it. He technically began deprogramming while he was working as a Special Representative for Community Relations in San Diego through Governor Reagan's office. As his Playboy interviewers point out, somewhat in disbelief, this meant that Patrick was "abducting kids and deprogramming them" while he was still working in the governor's office.[60]

The conditions of those caught in the snares of 1960s gurus shared little with those in Depression-era Chattanooga. Observers obsessed over the fact that so many NRM recruits were white, middle-class, comfortable, educated. Some came from families with easily identifiable problems, and others suffered from mental health and substance issues. But many did not. Often, critics explained the cult problem as a result of affluence, rather than of poverty. Many rabbis, for instance, claimed that Jewish suburban assimilation was largely to blame for the incursion of the cults into their communities. This argument became commonplace, and Patrick agreed that naiveté and a lack of street-smarts left middle-class white kids in a vulnerable position. Patrick wasn't alone in this train of thought, which by 1980 made it all the way to the floor of the New

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[56] Ted Patrick with Tom Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!*, 38-39.

[57] The Children of God, now known as the Family International, was formed in 1968 in Southern California. It began as an outgrowth of the "Jesus Freak" Movement, a style of Christianity that blended worship, authority structures, and the style of the counter culture. David Berg, known as Moses by his followers, released thousands of missives called "Mo Letters," in which he spelled out his ideas on a huge variety of topics. Like Reverend Moon, Berg's teachings had an emphasis on prophesying about the future of the world, in which capitalism would be replaced by communism (both of which Berg opposed) followed by socialism. Berg's followers believed him to be a prophet. The group has been the subject of great scrutiny and controversy, especially over charges of child abuse and the sexual exploitation of women members, and were forced to flee the United States in the 1970s.

[58] Patrick and Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!*, 48.

[59] Patrick and Dulack, *Let Our Children Go!,* 60.

[60] Patrick, 1979 Playboy Interview, 82.

York State Assembly during debate over the infamous Lasher amendment, a "mental hygiene" bill that would effectively allow family members of NRM recruits to gain conservatorships with greater ease on dubious grounds including that the converts had experienced "sudden changes" in personality.

Patrick did not find social arguments which blamed mainstream conditions satisfying. He insisted that unwitting recruits could be converted "on-the-spot," crediting cult leaders with the ability to hypnotize recruits using immediate mind control tactics. Thus this theory took responsibility away from families and the shortcomings of American life, and placed the blame squarely on the nefarious cult leaders, like David Berg of COG or Reverend Moon. Patrick saw the issue partly as one of mind-control and brainwashing. Brainwashing has since been thoroughly debunked, but at the time it was promulgated by highly respected mental health and legal professionals. In addition to mental coercion put in sanitary, scientific terms by doctors and other professionals, Patrick gave some credit to Satan himself, echoing claims of Christian anticult activists. He gave his most public address on these theories during his testimony during the Dole Hearings, an informal congressional meeting held after the tragedy at Jonestown in early 1979. In the early 1970s, though, Patrick remained a relatively unknown but increasingly sought after anticult activist, whose audience and influence grew alongside the burgeoning anticult movement itself.

The ACM would grow as a diverse and committed coalition in the early 1970s. Patrick formed a group, FREECOG (Free the Children of God), in 1971 after his encounter with the group. FREECOG merged with other grassroots organizations to become first notable anticult organization, the Citizens' Freedom Foundation and eventually the Cult Awareness Network (CAN), which would remain the most visible anti-cult force until its dissolution in the 1990s. These groups were formed by concerned parents as well as those offering services to get kids out of cults, like Patrick and Rabbi Maurice Davis. Davis served as rabbi at the Jewish Community Center in White Plains, New York, and was a noted civil rights activist. In 1972, after fielding reports of recruitment from numerous congregants, Davis formed Citizens Engaged in Reuniting Families (CERF). While Davis was amenable to explanations for recruitment that relied on social causes, he agreed with Patrick that something more malignant was afoot in terms of the psychological hold the groups had on their converts. As Unification Church expert and sociologist Eileen Barker has noted, studies on prisoners of war during the Korean War-era were popular, and served as significant medical and academic justification for the ACM.[61] It gave credence to the idea that recruits had not made their own decisions to convert to a religion as was their right, but that they were the victims of sophisticated mind-control operations to steal their money, their bodily autonomy, and their very psyches.

By the mid-1970s, the ACM found their greatest mainstream champion and most significant political ally in Kansas senator Robert Dole. Dole became the most famous cultfighter in the country when he spearheaded the 1979 congressional meeting on cults after Jonestown.

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[61] Brainwashing is one of the most controversial and significant aspects of the cult wars. Robert J. Lifton's 1961 book *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism: a Study of "Brainwashing" in China* (New York: Norton, 1961), coined and popularized the term. Psychologists continued to argue for decades about the usefulness and scientific legitimacy of the idea of brainwashing, which was often used to describe situations in which someone's political or religious beliefs had seemed to suddenly change under intense pressure and influence. During the cult wars, professionals on both sides testified about the techniques by which someone could become coerced or influenced. While the theory of brainwashing has now been debunked by psychologists, it remains a powerful cultural notion that raises important questions about free will and the sincerity of belief.

But his longstanding interest in the cult issue and particularly adversarial relationship with the UC began in 1976. Dole went against his mentor President Nixon in his fervent, almost dogged campaigning against the Unificationists. This oppositional stance to the President's did not at all represent any sort of radicalism or maverick image on Dole's part, however. In fact, Dole staged more campaigns for the White House than perhaps any Republican of his time. From 1976 to 1996, he repeatedly attempted to center himself as the potential future of the Republican Party. In this sense, Dole's constant campaigning meant that he regularly repositioned himself over 20 years of a shifting Republican Party. His opposition to the cults was not incidental, but instead constitutive of his own worldview and the one he had for his party.

From the beginning, Dole identified core issues with the UC that would continue to motivate his anticult activism through the mid-1980s: the group's political goals, parental concerns, and the legitimacy of the UC's tax-exempt status. Dole's crusade against cults began with a 1976 letter to Donald Alexander, the head of the IRS. Dole told Alexander that he had been contacted by "a large number of constituents" worried about the Unification Church. He suggested that the Moon organization might be a political, rather than religious, movement and that their tax-exempt status was thus suspect. Even from this earliest letter Dole showed some fluency in anticult theories. He noted that that as far as he understood young people in the group were "subjected to a drastic mental and psychological reorientation of questionable moral legitimacy."[62] This letter, the earliest record of Dole's interest in the cult issue, hit on several key themes which would both endear him within his own party and also put him out of step with their concerns: first, that his core concern was about young people's well-being and that he was acting as an advocate of the parents. Second, that the issue at hand was about the legitimacy of the UC's claim to tax-exempt religious status, not the group's right to exist. Dole would have to defend this position over and over again over the next nearly 10 years. Advocates of religious freedom accused Dole of a dangerous meddling of the state in religious affairs; other Republicans increasingly made similar claims, as overt scrutiny of religious affairs for tax purposes became more and more politicized and anathema to the Republican base. Dole seemed to believe that he could use the IRS as a tool to address the concerns of parents while skirting charges that he was interfering with small religious groups; this would turn out to be a miscalculation.

The use of the IRS as a tool in Dole's arsenal would become increasingly in conflict with dominant trends among the religious rightwing of the Republican Party. The Bob Jones University case, which would become a hot-button issue for Ronald Reagan in in 1982, was already working its way through the courts. In 1970, the IRS had placed a ban on tax-exemptions for private schools with racially discriminatory policies. Bob Jones, a proudly fundamentalist university in South Carolina, had reluctantly admitted one Black student in order to skirt reprimand, but refused to change its policy banning interracial dating. The case became a flashpoint for debates around schools, civil rights, and religious freedom. Ronald Reagan made public his sympathy with BJU, and reinstated the school's exempt status in 1982. Bob Dole showed consistency on this issue. In 1983, when he was the chair of the Senate Finance Committee which had jurisdiction over tax matters, he lauded the Supreme Court's 8-1 decision to uphold the IRS's right to deny exemptions from discriminatory private schools. In so doing,

[62] Letter from Bob Dole to Donald Alexander, January 2 1976, Legislative Subjects, Box 765, Folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

he went against Ronald Reagan and a vocal Republican Christian right whose concerns over the autonomy of religious institutions became increasingly centered within the party.[63]

Dole's views, especially his persistent efforts to undermine the UC's tax-exempt status, sometimes found him at odds with dominant trends in Republican politics by the late 1970s and early 1980s. But at first, the tax issue shielded Dole against charges that he was persecuting religious minorities. When pressed during the first years of his anticult activism, Dole would say that he was interested in looking into the tax-exempt status of the group, not obliterating them. Dole insisted that the issue was purely about taxes and what constitutes a real religion, though he was not himself willing to adjudicate this question. Instead, he would say, the problem lay in political organizations like Moon's posing as a purely religious one.

Dole saw political value in the cult issue: his activities regarding the UC, and NRMs in general, always generated a public announcement from Dole's office. Politically, his stance linked him to parental concerns, casting him as a defender of families, of traditional religious values, of the sanctity of the home. Why else, for instance, would a savvy and ambitious politician like Dole take the time in the weeks leading up to the 1976 election in which he was the vice presidential candidate to issue a press release about his anti-cult activity? The notion that novel, fringe religious groups used questionable tactics to persuade impressionable young people to abandon propriety and normal adulthood for something more sinister and transgressive jibed with a sense of intergenerational fracture and cultural shift.

Dole and his hero, Richard Nixon, might have been on different sides of the Unification Church, but Dole's handling of the cults was straight out of Nixon's silent majority playbook. When Nixon famously spoke of the silent majority, he was referring to those Americans afraid to or unable to speak up, but who were opposed to antiwar protests, to countercultural revolution, and to the vast changes tearing America asunder.[64] Dole deployed a similar concept in his cult-related activities: insisting that average Americans disapproved of these groups' activities, and wanted a return to normal parent/child and religious relationships. Cults came to signify intergenerational and cultural strife. Dole's invocation of the silent majority echoes his reference to the "large number of constituents" who contacted him about the cult issue. Indeed, he was fond of referring to a silent majority of concerned parents, who wrote him letters in droves and demanded public action in response to the cult scare. To fight the cults was to defend the American family, tradition, and faith, against the incursion of radicalism and strange, ungodly beliefs.

But Bob Dole's effort to harness the investigative powers of government to represent constituent concerns about the cult issue was not without precedent. There were two significant events, both in 1974, that represented the first victories of the nascent ACM in drawing the attention of elected officials to their plight. The government remained largely uninvolved in cult issues until 1974 when California and New York made their first forays into the murky waters of cult recruitment of young people. Actions in both states were heralded by the ACM, who felt that

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[63] For more on the Bob Jones case and the role of the IRS in civil rights and religious freedom battles in the 1970s and 1980s, see: Joseph Crespino, "Civil Rights and the Religious Right," in Schulman and Zelizer, *Rightward Bound*.; Aaron Haberman, "Into the Wilderness: Ronald Reagan, Bob Jones University, and the Political Education of the Christian Right," *Historian* 67, no. 2 (Summer 2005); Olatunde C. Johnson, "The Story of Bob Jones University v. United States: Race, Religion, and Congress' Extraordinary Acquiescence," SSRN Scholarly Paper (Rochester, NY: Social Science Research Network, March 11, 2010), https://papers.ssrn.com/abstract=1552173.

[64] For more on the silent majority the shifting nature of conservatism, including parents' activism around schools, see Matthew Lassiter, *The Silent Majority: Suburban Politics in the Sunbelt South* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2007.)

it was high time their elected officials heard their concerns. Patrick as well as the parents who enlisted his help continued to grow frustrated at a lack of real government action in the face of cults, and felt that in 1974 finally someone listened to them.

After lobbying, they finally got the ear of Mervyn Dymally, a State Senator from Southern California's 29th district. Dymally had been born in Trinidad in 1926, and enjoyed a long and illustrious career as a California State Assembly member, State Senator, and US congressman. He also served as Jerry Brown's Lieutenant Governor from 1975-1979, and in doing so became the first African American to hold this office. In the mid and late 1970s, Dymally would form a close relationship with Peoples Temple leader Jim Jones. He acted as a critical liaison between Jones and Forbes Burnham, the Prime Minister of Guyana, where Jones and his people settled their community, Jonestown, in 1974. In 1983, Dymally would also sponsor a bill in the US House which sought to check the powers of government to interfere in religious activities. This bill drew attention and criticism from Bob Dole's office.

Before his association with Jones or interest in religious groups, Dymally responded to repeated calls by vocal constituents to investigate "cult" activity. On August 24, 1974, he chaired a hearing as part of the Senate Subcommittee on Children and Youth to discuss the "Impact of Cults on Today's Youth." Dymally insisted that the hearing was not a formal investigation or judicial proceeding, but merely attempted to give "both sides of this issue" a chance to be heard.[65] Dymally's careful treading around the issue of the First Amendment and religious freedom would be echoed by Bob Dole and countless other officials who attempted to delicately tackle the cult issue. In the interest of appearing neutral, Dymally tried to balance testimony by parents and anticult activists with that of NRM members. The hearing thus took on a distinctly California flavor. Representatives from known NRMs like the Divine Light Mission spoke in defense of joining new, innovative religions. There were also more eccentric choices, like David St. Clair, the president of the Southern California Society for Psychical Research. He and a few others like him were there ostensibly to defend "energies" and the notion that really, certain far-out practices were not so far out at all, let alone truly satanic or dangerous.[66]

It became clear quickly, however, that the hearing was ACM turf. Distraught parents, ex-members, and deprogrammers like Ted Patrick offered their frightening, and often heartbreaking, experiences with the cults. Patrick received especially resounding applause. He expounded on "on-the-spot" hypnosis, offered examples of "mental energy" including magicians bending spoons on television, and claimed that "the first mind control was used on Eve by Satan the snake."[67] If these people could look you in the eye, Patrick warned, they had you in their hands. Religion had little to do with the rackets these people ran, as they were in it for money, for labor, for power. The First Amendment was thus "nothing but a license to kill, lie, and steal, and do everything under the sun as long as you've got a nonprofit corporation and say you're a church."[68] He continued, explaining his brand of deprogramming which, to his mind, only restored one's freedom of religion by allowing the deprogrammee to think independently for themselves once again. Patrick's testimony reads as eccentric, if not a bit unhinged, but to this

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[65] California State Senate, Select Committee on Children and Youth, *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth,* August 24, 1977, 1. Accessible via Hathitrust: https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31210012336655&view=1up&seq=2

[66] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 15.

[67] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 53-54.

[68] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 55.

audience he was a welcome contrast from the cowardly officials who hid behind excuses of First Amendment rights for cults as their children suffered.

Even if Dymally had planned to hold an objective hearing on the cult issue, the parents' testimony could have little impact other than sympathy and horror. There were accounts of psychological abuse, medical negligence, inadequate and dangerous living conditions, and, of course, mind control and brainwashing. One mother, Lydia Wizell, testified that ever since her daughter had joined the Alamo Foundation "her entire personality has changed."[69] Susan and Tony Alamo's group, along with Children of God, received special though not exclusive attention in the hearing.[70] Dymally made a point to remind speakers that the hearing was not a "forum for any personal antagonism toward any group."[71] Other parents and ex-members, however, including Susan Alamo's own daughter, described beatings, intimidation, and mistreatment by the group both as members and as outsiders. Over the course of the hearings, more and more parents spoke of attempts to get their children out of strange communes and churches, often with the help of Ted Patrick.

As these parents detailed horrific and heartbreaking accounts, they expressed frustration with a fundamental challenge to legal intervention: the ages of their children. The subcommittee Dymally chaired was, after all, on children and youth, and this was the subject of the hearing that day. One mother stood up at the end of the hearing and brought the issue directly to Dymally's attention. She said that Dymally's initial statement that the hearing was about children "worrie[d] me very much, because most of us here, our children are over 18." Dymally had little to say in the way of response beyond that the question of those over eighteen "leads to some very serious problems for us."[72] The fact of legal majority at the age of eighteen would prove, again and again, to be an enormous obstacle for parents, and would eventually lead to lengthy court battles over conservatorship laws. Parents understandably felt that it was still their job to protect their offspring, who were still their kids, even if in the eyes of the law they were fully autonomous adults. Politicians, legislators, and law enforcement officials, on the other hand, had little room to amend laws without dangerous consequences.

The New York Charity Fraud Bureau's "Final Report on the Activities of the Children of God," known as the Lefkowitz Report after the NY Attorney General, made a bigger splash. In more sober and legalistic terms than the California testimony, it made explosive claims about COG and the group's financial and sexual improprieties. The interim report, released in January of 1974, had been newsworthy. The final report was damning. It accused Berg and his group, among other things, of wrongfully claiming tax exempt status, which it had been denied; instructing members to obtain funds from parents and relatives using manipulation; and teaching

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[69] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 20.

[70] The Alamo Christian Foundation was founded in 1969 in Hollywood, California by Tony and Susan Alamo, a married couple. A Pentecostal church, the movement grew out of the same Jesus People milieu as Children of God and other new churches. Like the Unification Church, they were known for their intensive proselytizing techniques. The church was mired in controversy for most of its existence. Susan Alamo died in 1982. After her death, the church became involved in various ventures, including making jackets and other clothing. These pieces became popular enough that Michael Jackson wore an Alamo jacket on the cover of his 1987 album *Bad*. The church was embroiled in lawsuits over its tax exempt status for years. Tony Alamo was eventually arrested and charged with ten counts of child sexual abuse in 2009. He died in prison in 2017.

[71] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 41.

[72] *Hearing on Impact of Cults on Today's Youth*, 133-134.

its members to disrespect and subvert "court process, orders, and decrees."[73] Much of this pertained to matters around fraud and deceit regarding the group's status as a church, and was disturbing in its own right as it indicated Berg's disregard for the law and his willingness to manipulate his followers financially. The picture the report painted got much darker. It claimed that first, the doctrine taught "hatred of parents."[74] It cited numerous examples, from Mo Letters (official dispatches from Berg) and member testimony, showing that inherent in the sect's teachings was a mission to "disrupt the familial relationship." Convincing members that parents were "systemites" and of the devil, the group worked hard to sever ties, limiting familial communication and offering identities distinct from families of origin in the form of "bible names."[75] COG sought to turn members against their families but also society as a whole, teaching that "all government is evil."[76]

The report promoted theories of brainwashing and thought control. The Dymally hearing had been more agnostic on the means by which groups manipulate members, though many parents and activists like Patrick had been unreserved in accusing group leadership of deploying tactics like brainwashing and mind control. While the language reads as more technical and less colorful than Patrick's testimony in California, the report made similarly dramatic claims about how a "total assault on the psyche is accomplished."[77] Outlining in detail means of achieving total psychological dominance, the report described practices of physical and mental isolation, punishment, deprivation, and other techniques.

The most explosive claims in the report centered on the rape, sexual coercion, and abuse of young people and children in the group, as well as Berg's own perverted attitudes toward sexuality. COG is famous for its use of "flirty fishing," a term for deploying the sexuality of women members for the purposes of the group in acts of "hooking for Jesus." Claims of abuse, including forced marriages and the encouragement of sexual acts between adults and children, became so alarming that the group fled the United States entirely in 1976.

Like the Dymally hearings, the Lefkowitz report ended with the admission that in spite of the "shocking facts outlined, no direct action by the Attorney General can be undertaken at this time by reason of the constitutional protection of the First Amendment."[78] While the relative lack of recourse at the legal level would remain frustrating for opponents of cults, public statements like this one did important work in creating an increasingly hostile environment for NRMs. For those who had long sounded alarms, it was a welcome intervention. To members and leaders of minority religions, it was a chilling prelude to a difficult period in which they faced increasing suspicion and scrutiny.

Nineteen seventy-four represented a watershed year in issues surrounding NRMs, ACM mobilization, brainwashing fears, and politics beyond these government inquiries. In April, Jim Jones and Peoples Temple purchased thousands of acres in the Guyanese Jungle, which they would use as the site of their utopian experiment known as Jonestown. That same month Patty Hearst, the beautiful young heiress who had been kidnapped by radicals known as the

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[73] *Final Report on the Activities of the Children of God* submitted by the Charity Frauds Bureau (Herbert J. Wallenstein, Assistant Attorney General In Charge) to Hon. Louis J. Lefkowitz, Attorney General of the State of New York, September 30 1974, 16.
[74] Lefkowitz report, 20.
[75] Lefkowitz report, 24.
[76] Lefkowitz report, 25.
[77] Lefkowitz report, 31.
[78] Lefkowitz report, 64.

Symbionese Liberation Army, would be caught on camera robbing a bank with her captors, yelling "I'm Tania. Up, up, up against the wall, motherfuckers." And in July, Neil Salonen, leader of the Unification Church's Freedom and Leadership Foundation, led 350 members to gather on the steps of the Capitol for a 3-day prayer and fasting action in support of President Nixon. Nixon was at this point deeply embroiled in the scandal of Watergate, and Moon had proven to be a staunch ally. This alliance would launch the movement into the national spotlight, making them the target of the national media surrounding cults. Children of God and Hare Krishnas had dominated the news cycle about cults, but soon the Korean preacher and his devotees would become the subject of fascination and suspicion both in American households and among members of Congress. At the same time, their audience with Nixon would confirm Moon's sense that he was meant to engage at the highest levels of political power, and would provide his first strong relationship within the Republican party.

If by the mid-1970s the UC would come to represent the very antithesis of traditional family and religious values in the eyes of Bob Dole and ACM, it was not because of a commitment to progressive, anti-American political beliefs. In fact, joining the UC precipitated a conservative turn for many if not the vast majority of converts. Many converts began, like much of their generation, with strong opposition to the Vietnam war. As they became increasingly enmeshed with the group and its anticommunist teachings, however, they almost uniformly came to approve of US conduct in Vietnam. Members of the Unification Movement undoubtedly believed in many of the social causes they promoted, and did good work to help the communities they lived in. But that doesn't mean they adopted the leftwing politics of their neighbors and fellow activists. Virulent anticommunism never left the ethos of the group even if it became buried under messages of oneness, unity, and social change. UC groups like the Social Action Project and others emphasized their commitment to leftwing issues like, for instance, racial equality, but also promoted themselves as a potential third way between the radical New Left and the cynical right. Steven Tipton and others have studied the striking transition from politics to religion of many Baby Boomers as the 1960s turned into the '70s.[79] This was a false dichotomy in the case of many UC members, who became more politically active after joining the group.

Conversion into the UC and a deepening relationship with its primary text, the *Divine Principle*, often resulted in a profound shift in political beliefs. Judah suggested that these changes were part of a broader evolution (noted by other observers at the time) from "trying to accomplish change by means of demonstration in a secular context" to changing individuals and the world around them through piety and spiritual transformation.[80] Judah's findings on attitudes toward communism are especially striking, and all the more considering the attitudes of UC members age cohorts. 25% were moderately or strongly opposed to communism when they joined the movement, which means the other 75% were either indifferent or, to some degree, in favor of it. After joining, the 25% remained opposed, while *every single other member surveyed* changed their position to strong opposition, with the exception of one who was only in the organization for three weeks.[81] As Judah points out, this is not so shocking when compared to

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[79] Tipton's groundbreaking study, *Getting Saved From the Sixties*, looked at several NRMs and the ways in which members found moral meaning in these groups in the turmoil of post-1960s America where various traditions were competing for primacy as systems of moral evaluation. Distinct systems that Americans had used to structure their moral lives—like biblical authority or certain types of utilitarianism—now competed with counterculture and other epistemologies. NRMs, to Tipton, saw NRM membership as one avenue for in particular young people to make sense this chaotic moment.

[80] Judah paper, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church,", 9.

[81] Judah paper, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church," 10.

other religious traditions, whose members also for the most part opposed communism. When viewed in context, however, there was a clear shift for many members toward an embrace of certain types of authority as well as an iconoclastic anti-establishment sentiment. Many became more respectful of authority and hierarchy upon joining the movement, but more strongly opposed to the establishment *because*, as one member put it, "the establishment is moving toward the counterculture." They specifically cited "pornographic movies! Who but the Unification Church has demonstrated against them?"[82] Indeed, in a trend that would prove especially critical to the UC's alliance with the GOP in the following decades, UC members held fast to conservative mores around sex, family, and marriage even as the world around them rapidly liberalized.

By the end of 1973, amid the Watergate scandal, Moon and his group fully supported Nixon. Watergate threatened Nixon's presidency and put further strain on the public's trust in the government. Years of war, lies, and increasingly apparent failure in Vietnam had already worn down the faith of many Americans in their leaders, and Watergate became a scandal of epic proportion. The UC took a strong a highly public stance on the matter. Beginning on November 30, 1973, Moon took out full page ads in every major newspaper in the country, including the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. Above a portrait of Moon himself, the headline blared in bold print: "AMERICA IN CRISIS/ANSWER TO WATERGATE/FORGIVE, LOVE, UNITE."[83] The movement began other actions, including the 42-day National Prayer and Fast for the Watergate Crisis. The UC's highly public defense of the president likely gained it more critics than friends, as Nixon became increasingly toxic. The president himself appreciated, even demanded, loyalty wherever he could find it. He was glad for the support of Moon and his group, who could turn out bodies at demonstrations and even deliver some youth support. Nixon invited Moon to the National Prayer breakfast on Jan 30, 1974, and gave him a 20-minute private audience the following day. In their meeting, Moon commended Nixon and allegedly told him to stand strong in his convictions.[84]

At the helm of activism in support of the president was the Freedom and Leadership Foundation, led by future UC president Neil Salonen. Salonen joined the church in the 1960s and became its American president in 1972. He was succeeded in 1980 by Mose Durst, a key figure in the Oakland School and Bay Area church. His time as president would be marked by media and political scrutiny, and repeated back-and-forths with Bob Dole. In 1974, Salonen and the FLF organized the UC's most public action during the Watergate controversy. The three-day prayer and fasting demonstration attracted unprecedented attention to the UC, as church members held signs that said things like "we have faith in the president" and "I am praying for President Nixon."[85] Salonen offered dire warnings about the implications of the scandal, reminding attendees that "both Hitler and Lenin took power on the heels of leaders made impotent by constraints upon their office and lack of cohesive support."[86] Reports attested that the 350-attendees were mostly young and white, mirroring some of the anti-war protests which had attracted so many college students in the 1960s and 1970s. This action provoked counter-protest which brought together strange bedfellows of Christian groups, who had since begun to

[82] Judah, "Attitudinal Changes Among Members of the Unification Church," 18.
[83] Bromley and Shupe, *Moonies in America*, 69.
[84] Barker, *The Making of a* Moonie, 62.
[85] Barker, *The Making of a Moonie*, 61.
[86] Washington (Associated Press), "Nixon Backers Begin Fast and Prayer Vigil at Capitol," July 23, 1973.

protest the false witness of the Unificationists, and leftwing activists, who took issue with the fervent anticommunism of the UC and the FLF in particular.

The FLF, founded in 1969, acted as the initial primary political organization within the UC to promote anticommunism among college students and other young people. Like SES and other organizations within the UC, the FLF sought to grow its ranks among young people who felt represented neither by the revolutionary rhetoric of many left causes nor by the stodgy conservatism of the Young Republicans or other conservative groups. The FLF tried to fight the attraction of "unexamined revolutionary rhetoric" by providing "a dynamic center of change." The FLF, it promised, would be that "radical center."[87] FLF materials argued that it was possible to be reasonable and radical, to be freethinking through rejecting the impulse to destroy the bedrocks of American society. The question was not how to destroy America, but "can American be transformed before she is destroyed?"[88] American youth was being consistently misled about communism and its promises. The FLF sought to bring them a "clear, complete understanding of the fallacies of Marxism-Leninism both in theory and in practice."[89]

Unification Church leadership, for its part, had long sought connections with high-profile politicians in the United States. When Moon founded the Korean Culture and Freedom Foundation (KCFF) in the 1960s former presidents Harry Truman and Dwight Eisenhower were named as honorary chairmen. Moon had great admiration for the United States and lofty ambitions for its role in the world, as well as for his own political plans. As stated in the *Divine Principle*, Moon envisioned a world in which he would eventually reign as the supreme ruler, having unified all of mankind and fulfilling his role as the messiah. Until then, however, he would team up with leadership in the United States against the common enemy of foreign communism.

Their activities during the Watergate scandal launched the UC into the public eye, and also helped solidify it as a national movement. The period of factionalism between followers of Miss Kim, Mr. Choi, and Bo-Hi Pak had transformed as a result of both Moon's relocation and the scrutiny brought on by the Moon-Nixon alliance. 1975 and '76 turned out to be critical for the UC, as it became "public enemy number one" of the cult scare, according to the ACM's champion, Ted Patrick.[90] They may have attracted increased scrutiny in this period, but also continued to make powerful connections in government. On December 18, 1975, Moon held a prayer meeting in a House of Representatives caucus room. At least 14 members of Congress attended the meeting, which involved little prayer and more sermonizing by Reverend Moon with the help of an interpreter. Rep. Richard Ichord (D-MO) introduced Moon, comparing him to Moses, John the Baptist, and Jesus. Neil Salonen was by this time the president of the national church, and responsible for organizing the meeting. Much of Moon's sermon focused on America's role in the world, and especially its responsibility to Korea which, the like the US, held a special place in God's plan for humankind. Salonen hoped that more representatives would attend the meeting, but it nonetheless confirmed the organization's access to the Capitol, assuring them that they had the ear of some of America's most powerful national politicians. The

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[87] FLF Weekend Seminar Flyer, 1969, Freedom Leadership Foundation folder, Box 116, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[88] Ibid.
[89] FLF pamphlet, ND, Freedom Leadership Foundation folder, Box 116, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[90] Patrick, *Let Our Children Go!*, 235.

New York Times reported that the Church claimed 30,000 adherents in the United States, though no members of Congress. Salonen responded: "We're always hopeful."[91]

The UC's alliance with Nixon, and Bob Dole's fixation on the Unification Church above all other groups, demonstrates how difficult it is to untangle the partisan allegiances within the cult issue as a whole or even to individual groups. Nixon promoted his alliance with Moon, or at least didn't hide it. Unification members were, as indicated by their public action and the statistics in Judah's study, totally devoted to Nixon. Ironically, it was a rare issue that Dole and Nixon fell on opposite sides of. Dole was among Nixon's greatest supporters, his protégé, and a lifelong defender. Until his retirement from the Senate, he kept a speed dial button for "Dick N." on his office phone.[92] He spoke effusively of Nixon in his eulogy, calling him "this century's greatest architect of peace." He spoke admiringly not only of Nixon's achievements, but of his style, his unwillingness to yield in the face of criticism and controversy, and of his love of the common people. To them, "Richard Nixon was an American hero, a hero who shared and honored their belief in working hard, worshiping God, loving their families and saluting the flag. He called them the silent majority. Like them, they valued accomplishment more than ideology."[93] Dole's reverence for Nixon's patriotism, but also his pragmatism, would define his own political career and style as well. Like his hero, Bob Dole was also a consummate politician, capable of a certain folksy Kansas manner but ultimately shrewd, calculating, and immensely practical. He took up the issue of the cults more than any other member of Congress. That he did so consistently and publicly speaks to the resonance of the issue and the potential he saw in it as a *conservative* issue. One for, perhaps, the silent majority.



President Nixon and Reverend Moon, 1974

[91] Joseph Lelyveld Special to The New York Times, "Korean Prays in House Caucus Room," *The New York Times*, December 19, 1975, sec. Archives, https://www.nytimes.com/1975/12/19/archives/korean-prays-in-house-caucus-room.html. NB: this *Times* article states that the UC was able to furnish a list of 14 congressman who attended the event, among the 42 who RSVPed, but they are not named.

[92] Phone from Robert Dole's Office, ME15.12375. Dole Memorabilia Collection. Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[93] Robert Dole, "Eulogy for Richard Nixon," delivered April 27, 1994.



Richard Nixon and Bob Dole, 1973[94]

By some measures, the UC had entered the mainstream milieu, gaining the friendship of President Nixon and holding court in a congressional caucus room. In reality, this was just the beginning of its struggle for political and public legitimacy. Weeks after Moon's audience in the caucus room, Bob Dole would begin organizing his first anti-UC meeting in earnest. Tax issues were not the primary subject of Dole's first meeting about the UC on Capitol Hill in February of 1976. At this meeting, the concerns of parents were front of mind. This meeting had two related effects: first, it solidified a conflict between Dole and the UC, often manifesting as man-to-man disputes with UC President Neil Salonen, that would last for a decade; and second, it helped crystallize a national image of the cult issue as one not about religious freedom, but about anguished parents and lost children.

Days after his correspondence with IRS commissioner Donald Alexander at the start of 1976, Dole announced that he had formally asked the IRS to audit the UC. The press release suggested that "many people" questioned whether the group "is based on religion or on 'brainwashing' and mind control techniques." Without a formal announcement, the release noted that "a number of parents" were "contemplating a trip to Washington to meet with Federal officials." For his part, "Dole indicated that he is looking into arrangements for meetings with leading officials" in various agencies.[95] He would not formally announce the meeting until early

[94] Dole Photograph Collection, box 145, folder 10. Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[95] Press Release, "Dole Asks for Unification Church Audit," January 12 1976, Digitized Press Releases Collection, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

February, but Dole quickly set about contacting officials within the Internal Revenue Service, the Criminal Division of the Justice Department, and Immigration and Naturalization Services. He asked for a "qualified deputy of team of staff" from each of these offices to attend the meeting he was organizing "concerning activities and practices of the Unification Church."[96] While Dole assured each official that the meeting would be an "informal discussion" for "parent groups," each expressed some limits on their involvement and even hesitation. Michael Ullman, the Assistant Attorney General, agreed to send a representative to the meeting but only to discuss the law in general terms as it might apply to the UC, not any specific cases or violations.[97] IRS commissioner Donald Alexander put the matter in starker terms: Dole's request "presented a dilemma" for the IRS, which was concerned that their inability to disclose specifics would create a difficult situation for parents who "understandably have a personal emotional involvement with and antagonism toward persons or organizations who are, or may be, exempt from taxation under the Code.[98] While Alexander "sincerely appreciate[ed]" what the Senator was trying to do for "troubled parents," his hands were tied, but the agency could still send a representative if the "fundamental limitations" were acceptable. The dilemma that Alexander perceived would continue to vex government officials who felt genuine concern for parent complaints, but felt even more committed to observing proper boundaries and protocols. Here emerged a line Dole would try to walk several times over the next several years.

Dole, for his part, insisted on the informality of the meeting and that its purpose was specifically to provide parents with a forum to address questions to government officials. In a letter to reserve the room for the meeting, Dole acknowledged that while the "subject matter discussed may at times become controversial, it is important to note that those participating will not be affiliated with any religious group—and in fact are not formally organized at all."[99] Dole was on the side of concerned parents, not any organization professing specific allegiances for or against the cults. He tried again and again, as he would in 1979, to play the part of neutral third party, hoping only to provide a platform for voiceless parents. Of course, it was impossible to do so without contributing to rising public opinion that the Unification Church was dangerous, and perhaps not a religion at all.

Dole also hoped to attract participation from his fellow representatives in Congress. He sent letters of invitation to his colleagues, including the time, date, and place, as well as the plethora of agencies participating. So many people, he said, were frustrated both because they could not contact their children in the groups nor generate action or response from their representatives. Dole noted that he expected "several" of his colleagues to join, since there had

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[96] Letter from Bob Dole to Leonard F. Chapman, January 26 1976, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[97] Letter from Michael M. Ullman to Bob Dole, February 10 1976, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[98] Letter from Donald Alexander to Bob Dole, February 5 1976, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[99] Letter from Bob Dole to Howard W. Cannon, February 2 1976, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

already been "substantial interest in this matter" displayed by members of Congress.[100] If they had any questions or wanted more materials on the issue, he suggested they contact Dr. George Swope. Swope was a fervent anticult activist and Baptist minister in Portchester, NY, who Dole would later call upon to testify at the more high-profile 1979 meeting. Dole's office kept a list of legislators who had expressed interest in the Unification Church meeting, including 28 senators and 36 house members. The list of senators in particular included some well-known names, like future vice president Walter Mondale, recent presidential nominee George McGovern, famed Dixiecrat Strom Thurmond, and a young senator from Delaware named Joe Biden.

According to a lengthy statement released to church members immediately after the meeting, Salonen and other UC representatives had scrambled in the days leading up to the meeting to counter some of negative publicity. The UC was under no illusion that the meeting would be even-handed, neutral, and purely informational. It worked to bring a contingent to Washington to appear in the caucus room and outside the Capitol in order to provide images of parents who supported their children's newfound faith. In the statement, Salonen painted a picture of Dole as a puppet of anti-UC groups. The senator, he explained to church members, was not himself an evil man but still remained unwilling to accept counterevidence in support of the movement. According to Salonen, the group had spent the days leading up to the meeting organizing tirelessly, working hard and barely sleeping in their anticipation and fear of what might happen on Wednesday, February 18th, when the meeting would flash on television screens across America.[101]

In spite of Dole's insistence on civility and neutrality, the worst fears of the UC were largely confirmed. The nationally televised event provided a forum for anti-UC religious leaders, psychologists, and former members who wished to alert the public to the dangers of the group. In addition to parents, vitriolic anticult activists like Rabbi Maurice Davis offered their opinions on the UC. Davis had become involved in deprogramming UC members in the early 1970s, and by this time was one of its most dogged opponents. Davis began with a grave pronouncement: "the last time I ever witnessed a movement that had these characteristics—with a single authoritarian head, fanatical followers, absolute unlimited funds, hatred for everyone on the outside, suspicion against their parents—was the Nazi youth movement, and I tell you I am scared."[102] The room was packed, and while some UC members and supportive relatives managed to squeeze into the back of the room, they were given little if any time on the floor. For NRMs and their supporters, it set a dangerous precedent and smacked of a witch-hunt.

Responses to the meeting by Reverend Moon himself are scant, but Neil Salonen expressed profound outrage. He called the meeting "one of the gravest injustices ever perpetrated against a religion in the history of our country."[103] He had decided that in this case, the best defense was a good offense, and had sent letters to various senators with allegations about Senator Dole. Dole finally agreed to set up a meeting between Salonen and himself in the days following the meeting. While a Dole aide called the meeting "cordial," the damage had largely

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[100] Letter from Bob Dole, February 11 1976, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[101] Neil A. Salonen, "Our response to Sen. Robert Dole's anti-Unification Church forum on Capitol Hill," March 1976. Accessed via tparents.com (an online repository of Unification Church documents): http://www.tparents.org/Library/Unification/Talks/Salonen/Salonen-760300.pdf

[102] Eleanor Blau, "300 Parents of Sun Myung Moon's Followers Call for Federal Investigation of His 'Fanatical' Church," *The New York Times*, February 19 1976.

[103] Salonen, "Our response."

been done. [104] Salonen and Dole would continue their antagonistic relationship for years, culminating in the outrage around the 1979 hearings Dole would hold after Jonestown.

Parents' concerns around young people, as well as the UC's status as a church rather than a political organization, framed Dole's first meeting. But the Unification Church, and what to do about it, continued to vex Dole and his colleagues in Congress for other reasons as well. As Dole continued to argue that it was a political organization, the question of what those politics were, and the danger they posed, became increasingly relevant in government inquiries about the UC. In spite of the fact that it had loudly, consistently proclaimed allegiance to the United States and its embattled president, suspicions of foreign incursion and Moon's aims at world domination bolstered the claims that this was a dangerous organization hellbent on recruiting young people for purposes beyond patriotic politics and peaceful religious practice.

Moon and his followers were acutely aware of charges that they were foreign, unpatriotic, and unwelcome in mainstream American politics. America, and its role in God's Providence, had been a central point in the *Divine Principle* and in Moon's speeches and teachings since the beginning of his ministry. They held elaborate events such as a 1976 God Bless America festival in honor of the bicentennial. In the planning of this event, to be held at Yankee Stadium with a massive show of UC support, Moon explicitly cited the need to bridge the chasm between associations of the movement as odd or fringe with their patriotic purpose. One goal of the event, Moon told his followers was to "make "God Bless America" and "Reverend Moon" synonymous in the hearts of every American."[105] The God Bless America festival and other UC events featured over-the-top patriotic imagery and made sure there was no confusion about where Reverend Moon's allegiances lay. America was the land of opportunity and promise, and it was not only possible but necessary for church members to feel as loyal to the United States as to their spiritual leader.

Events like this did little to stem the tide against the UC in Congress and the media. In March of 1976, Senator James Buckley of New York asked that several parts of Dole's meeting be entered into the record. He acknowledged that the issue was growing more and more important to Americans, as "I believe all of us are receiving increasing mail inquiring about the activities" of the UC and Moon himself. While "there can be no doubt but that the Unification Church does represent a religious movement" and remained entitled to First Amendment Protections, the business and political interests of Reverend Moon could not be ignored.[106] After providing a list of "'Moon' organizations, Senator Buckley submitted an excerpt from "Master Speaks," a Moon treatise that included his thoughts on political action, as well as a statement given at the February Dole meeting by an ex-member. The excerpt lays out in explicit detail Moon's desire to gain power within the Republican Party in particular, before eventually establishing a "Christian political party" which would render the Communist party "helpless before ours."[107] Buckley seems to have chosen the passage for its inclusion of some of Moon's most frightening rhetoric and grandiose future planning. "The present UN" he declared, "must be annihilated by our power." He urged that "we must have an automatic theocracy to rule the

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[104] No author, "Dole Meeting with Moon Aide Called Cordial," *Lawrence-World Journal*, February 24, 1976.
[105] Bo Hi Pak, "We Are Going to Create the Miracle of the Century" *Truth Is My Sword: Testimony of COL. BO HI PAK at the Korea Hearings, U.S. Congress* (Hsa-Uwc Publications, 1978).
[106] James Buckley (NY). "The Unification Church." *Congressional Record* 122 (1976) p. 8084. (Text from: *Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection*); accessed April 27, 2022.
[107] Ibid.

world" and that it was necessary to "purge the corrupted politicians, and the sons of God must rule the world." "The separation between religion and politics," Moon told his followers, "is what Satan likes best."

The 1976 event fixed Bob Dole squarely in the crossfires of the UC, and began his efforts to make the cult issue a campaign issue. Dole became the congressional contact point for Americans looking to be heard on the cult issue. He received letters from colleagues asking for materials, from parents nationally asking for his help, and from angry NRM members and sympathizers who thought what he was doing was dangerous. Throughout the next several years, Dole's office would receive thousands of letters from those on both sides of the cult wars. One mother from Michigan, whose daughter had been in the UC since 1973, wrote Dole with many questions in 1977: "Mr. Dole, why is he able to cheat the gov't brainwash our children send them into the street to sell who knows what besides flowers and peanuts, etc., why the delay, why is it taking so long to throw the book at him, he is certainly guilty of many things."[108] Dole responded with in a characteristically sympathetic yet measured way. He too was "deeply concerned about the grief" the UC caused, but because of the First Amendment little could be done legally. He was, however, continuing to pursue questions about the tax-exempt status of the organization, working with the IRS and forwarding information along to them whenever relevant.[109] In another letter, Dole indicated that the tax issue provided a critical "roadblock" to investigation: as long as the group remained protected as a tax exempt religious entity, they were nearly untouchable.[110] One constituent wrote to express that they were "appall[ed]" at the deprogramming of former cult members, calling the practice "nothing short of the worst and most flagrant violation of the first amendment in past history."[111] Others wrote to Dole's office requesting information, transcripts of his meeting, or further resources. Amateur cult-watchers sent the senator their own files, hoping that they might be of some use in the senator's hands. Dole would always respond politely but firmly reiterate the limits of his own, and of the government's, power in the matter. He also became a point person for colleagues in Congress, who would send along inquiries from their own constituents.

Dole seemed to have felt great sympathy for those who felt grief over familial membership in NRMs, but he also saw some political opportunity in the issue. He made an effort, for instance, to foreground cult-fighting activity in the lead-up to the 1976 election, in which he was the Republican candidate for Vice President. In late September, Dole contacted the attorney general in order to arrange a meeting between Robert J. Lifton and Richard Delgado. Dole acknowledged the potentially thorny religious freedom issues in his request to the DOJ, but ultimately stressed that there were many non-religious aspects of the groups that deserved the

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[108] Letter from Kathryn Gricar to Bob Dole, July 21 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[109] Dole response to Gricar, August 2 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[110] Letter from Bob Dole to Helen Hinson, November 4 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[111] Letter from Jackson D. Davis to Bob Dole, 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

agency's attention.[112] Such issues, he thought, deserved the input of intellectual heavy hitters. Lifton, a psychiatrist at Yale, had written perhaps the most influential book on brainwashing and thought reform. He studied POWs from the Korean War and Chinese tactics of brainwashing. While Lifton did not coin the term, by the 1970s he was the foremost expert on the subject. Richard Delgado was a law professor at UCLA, and would go on to be pivotal in the formation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as a legal framework. Delgado fiercely advocated for brainwashing as a permissible theory in court. He believed that questions of criminal responsibility be considered in light of potential mind control techniques practiced by cult organizations, and that such techniques should call into questions the firm First Amendment protections enjoyed by NRMs. Both scholars, but Delgado in particular, would go on to testify against the cults in various public settings, lending their credentials to now discredited ideas about brainwashing and other techniques.

The Justice Department obliged, and Lifton and Delgado met with agency officials on October 13. The following day, just a little over two weeks before the contentious 1976 election, Dole's office released a statement on his efforts to arrange the meeting as well as other anticult activities. That year alone, he had sought investigations into the tax-exempt status of the UC, sponsored the February meeting, and brought Delgado and Lifton to Washington. The issue was not going away, and Dole was glad at the chance to draw attention to "a phenomenon which is having a substantial impact on a growing number of American families."[113] The Delgado/Lifton meeting also brought his anticult activity beyond the realm of tax questions and into the much thornier problem of brainwashing theory. By the end of 1976, Dole had cemented his status as primary congressional cultfighter and parent advocate.

Dole and incumbent Gerald Ford lost in 1976, and as Democrat Jimmy Carter took office there were renewed efforts to appeal to the new AG, Griffin Bell. Concerned parents continued to flood Dole's office, asking him to arrange new meetings between Lifton, Delgado, and Bell, and lauding the efforts of Dole's colleague in the House, Connecticut Democrat Bob Giaimo. Throughout 1977, Giaimo would press the Justice Department to take seriously charges of brainwashing among cult groups. He met with officials, bringing in colleagues in Congress and urging the DOJ to consider pursuing criminal charges against groups who seemed to use mind control techniques on recruits. Finally, in the summer of 1977, Giaimo received a firm response from Assistant Attorney General Benjamin R. Civiletti: "it continues to be the position of the Criminal Division that allegations of "brainwashing," "mind control," "thought reform" or "coercive persuasion" would not support a prosecution under the Federal kidnapping statute."[114] Carter and his administration had taken a firm stance on the cult issue. They would hold fast to this stance, even when it would appear most unpopular.

Dole and Giaimo were not the only members of Congress concerned about the cult issue, or about the Unification Church in particular. 1977 and 1978 delivered the UC its greatest challenge yet: a congressional subcommittee investigation. This investigation represents the

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[112] Letter from Bob Dole to Edward H. Levi, July 21 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[113] Press Release, "Dole Announces Justice Department Meeting with "Brainwashing Experts," October 16 1976, Digitized Press Releases Collection, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[114] "Justice Department's Position on "Brainwashing" and Cults," *Congressional Record* 123 (1977) p. 27090. (Text from: *Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection*); accessed April 27, 2022.

height of official anti-UC action and demonstrates the deeply bipartisan nature of anticult activism in Congress. While the group still had some allies in the legislature, its allegiance to Nixon had proven more controversial than they had bargained for. In the wake of Watergate, there were renewed efforts among Republicans to distance themselves from the shady Nixon administration, and Democrats like Donald Fraser and Leo Ryan demanded more transparency from the executive, especially in foreign affairs. The Fraser subcommittee, while ostensibly on Korean-American relations, largely centered on the role of the UC in those relations. This investigation brought NRMs into the fold of larger congressional questions about the role of the US government in the world.

On February 3, 1977, the committee on Foreign Relations authorized a subcommittee to begin an investigation of "all aspects of the political, military, intelligence, economic, educational, and informational relationships, between the Republic of Korea and the United States."[115]At the helm of the investigation was Democratic Congressman Donald Fraser of Minnesota. Fraser had made a name for himself in the 1970s as the congressman most closely associated with the new liberal human rights agenda. Indeed, according to historian Barbara Keys, Fraser was more than anyone else "responsible for creating a framework that linked disparate global problems under the heading of human rights."[116] Fraser had led high-profile congressional investigations into the activities of global governments accused of violating both the rights of its own citizens as well as conducting themselves unfairly on the global stage. Fraser now turned his attention to Korea, and specifically to the activities of the Unification Church.

What would become known as the Fraser subcommittee represented the culmination of months and even years of suspicion within Congress about the activities of the Unification Church. While the UC was at the center of the investigation into Korean-American relations, the activities of the subcommittee represented a larger post-Vietnam turn in Congress with regard to human rights and international relations. The 467-page report, released at the end of October, 1978, detailed myriad ways in which the South Korean government, the Republic of Korea (ROK), had tried to influence American policy and sentiment toward that country. Critical to these efforts was the "Moon organization," referred to in the report to mean all political, religious, cultural, and financial activities associated with Sun Myung Moon.[117] The subcommittee was most interested in Bo Hi Pak, Moon's right-hand-man and translator. Pak had founded the Korean Culture and Freedom Foundation under the auspices of the Unification Church. The report accused Pak, the KCFF, and the Moon organization broadly of participating in campaigns to influence Congress, disseminating propaganda about the ROK, and engaging in intimidation and coercion of dissidents. A larger scandal, Koreagate, involving businessman Tongsun Park and several Democratic congressmen, further strained US-Korea relations when it broke in 1976. This scandal, alongside alleged human rights abuses in the ROK as well as disagreement about troop withdrawal from South Korea, created a tangled web of US-Korea relations and precipitated the subcommittee's investigation.[118]

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[115] U.S. House, Committee on International Relations, *Investigation of Korean-American Relations Report* (95 H. Rpt. 35-508), October 31, 1978. Text from: *U.S. Government Printing Office,* page 3. Referred to hereafter as "Fraser Report."

[116] Barbara J. Keys, *Reclaiming American Virtue: The Human Rights Revolution of the 1970s*, *Reclaiming American Virtue* (Harvard University Press, 2014), 76.

[117] Fraser Report, 8.

[118] Fraser Report, 48.

The investigation garnered bipartisan support. Democrat Donald Fraser led the investigation, and the subcommittee included several Democrats including, notably, congressman Leo Ryan of California. Members of the Republican minority offered some thoughts at the end of the report, expressing misgivings about the investigation as a whole, with one exception. "Despite these real reservations and concerns over various aspects of this report," they wrote, "the Minority wishes to assert its particular support of the finding of the section on the Moon organization."[119] Congressmen had been receiving letters about the UC for years, and understood their colleagues' efforts to stymie its activities. Even if little could be done regarding the religious organization itself, the investigation and its report offered an opportunity for members of Congress to come down firmly and express concern over the group's influence.

Unsurprisingly, many cult-watchers wrote to Dole proclaiming support for the subcommittee's investigation and urging his participation. Dole responded that while he was "certainly" supportive of their efforts, he felt that as a member of the senate he needed to maintain appropriate distance from the investigation. As for the senate, he assured constituents that he had "renewed" his efforts to obtain a session on the group's tax exempt status with the IRS.[120] Newspapers throughout the country picked up on the story and whipped up controversy. One article in the Chicago *Tribune* reported that the Fraser committee accused the UC of working with "the covert support of the Seoul government to build up a powerful network of enterprises dedicated to creating a universal anti-Communist theocracy."[121] Other national outlets picked up salacious details and allegations. The report generated a huge amount of discussion about the group, and its potentially shady business deals and political designs. Suddenly, the claims made by Dole, Giaimo, and numerous parents seemed both less outlandish and higher stakes. Perhaps Moon was not only endangering American youth, but American national security as a whole.

The Unification Church issued full-throated, point-by-point denials of the allegations made about it in the Fraser report, framing the investigation as a witch-hunt against a persecuted religious minority. Salonen went to meet with Fraser in May of 1976, and according to church documents, was assured that the subcommittee would act in good faith towards the UC. In June, Fraser invited Salonen to participate in what the UC deemed yet another "trial-by-media." While Salonen declined, the public hearing "aggravated the existing religious intolerance toward Unification Church members, and made headlines for Congressman Fraser."[122] They accused the subcommittee of slandering Reverend Moon, making him out to look like "another Hitler or Stalin," though all he really wanted was non-violent change in which "the freedom of each individual is held sacred."[123] The UC had some non-NRM allies. J. Gordon Melton was a professor and minister who would go on to head the Alliance for the Preservation of Religious Liberty, an organization that advocated for the rights of NRMs and others. He remains to this day one of the foremost scholars on NRMs. Melton, then the director of the Institute for the Study of

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[119] Fraser Report, 439.
[120] Letter from Bob Dole to Helen Greiving, November 4 1977, Senate papers, Constituent Issue Mail, box 235, folder 17, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.
[121] No author, "Accuse Moon of Power Plot," *Chicago Tribune*, November 2 1978.
[122] ND, "Abuses of Power by the House Subcommittee on International Organizations," Box 116, Unification Church files, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[123] "Preliminary Response from the Unification Church to House Subcommittee on International Organizations Report, November 3, 1978," Box 116, Unification Church files, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.

American Religion, wrote Fraser directly. Melton suggested that rampant misreporting of facts from the case was spreading through newspapers like wildfire and asked for proof of allegations against the UC.[124] While the report furnished plenty of negative publicity around the movement, it also contributed to their sense of religious persecution, and allowed it to solidify bonds with advocates like Melton who were concerned about religious freedom questions more broadly. These tactics would serve the UC especially well down the line, when it found itself at the center of post-Jonestown debate around cults in the United States.

The report, while troubling to many, did not actually find that Moon or his organization had committed any prosecutable offenses. Nor did it lead to further action or investigation against the group. It did, however, provide fodder for both sides. Bo Hi Pak, Moon's top aide who had been at the center of the investigation, published a booklet in response, entitled *The Truth is My Sword*. Bob Boettcher, subcommittee staff director, would publish his own account of the investigation, entitled *the Gifts of Deceit*. Boettcher would go on to testify at the Dole's 1979 post-Jonestown hearing and in other anticult fora. To read these two sources side by side, it feels as though the authors were living in two totally different realities.[125] Boettcher gave voice to the most suspicious, accusatory, and even hysterical theories about the role of the UC in public affairs. Pak, conversely, denied all charges and declared himself, and his church, exonerated. Partly because no actual charges stemmed from the investigation, those on either side of the NRM issue walked away feeling that their suspicions (about the UC or about the government) had been proven correct.

The Unification Church had begun the 1970s as a relatively unknown NRM with its membership growing in California especially but little national traction. By the end of the decades, it had garnered national attention from a variety of ways, good and bad. Where a group like Children of God were roundly criticized, held up as an example of hippie religion gone terribly awry, the UC had made powerful enemies but also strong allies. This paradoxical status—to some a dangerous cult, to others a peaceful religious group—would define it for the rest of the 1970s, as it fought fiercely for their place in the milieu of conservative religious politics. The battle between these two public images—cults as embattled minority religions vs. as pseudo-religious, exploitative organizations—would have major consequences for questions of religious freedom, family values, and religious politics.

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[124] Letter from J. Gordon Melton to Donald Fraser, May 15 1978, Box 116, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.

[125] See Robert B. Boettcher and Gordon L. Freedman, *Gifts of Deceit: Sun Myung Moon, Tongsun Park, and the Korean Scandal*, 1st ed (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1980); Pak, *Truth Is My Sword*.

Chapter 2:
Fragmenting the Family: Jewish Survival and the Cult Scare in the 1970s

> Gentlemen of the Congress: I am not here to protest against religion, or against religions. I am here to protest against child molesters, for as surely as there are those who lure children with lollypops in order to rape their bodies, so, too, are there those who lure children with candy-coated lies in order to rape their minds… The path of segregation leads to lynching every time. The path of antisemitism leads to Auschwitz every time. The path of the cults leads to Jonestowns and we watch it at our peril. [126]
>
> --Rabbi Maurice Davis's testimony before Congress, February 1979

By the time Maurice Davis delivered his dramatic and colorful testimony on Capitol Hill in 1979, he had been engaged in the Jewish struggle against cult recruitment for nearly a decade. The cult wars of the 1970s were fought by varied coalitions, each bringing the concerns of their own communities to a broader alliance. In defense of NRMs, group members, leaders, academics, and civil libertarians joined forces in the cause of religious freedom. The anticult movement likewise transcended political and religious division in common cause. One important faction of the ACM involved Jewish community members and religious leaders. For anticult rabbis like Davis, the cult scare of the 1970s and 1980s felt like nothing less than a fight for Jewish survival—as well as that of the nation. The threat was existential and multilayered: by luring Jewish youths from Judaism, the cults hastened assimilation and intermarriage, discouraging young Jews from creating Jewish families. At the same time, the cults were antidemocratic—the struggle against them was one against totalitarianism itself. Like other anticultists, Jewish anticult activists fought NRMs within the home. They also fought against what they viewed as a global terror which threatened the liberal democratic order that protected Jews in the United States.

In the 1970s, cults became an increasingly pressing concern for Jewish parents, community groups, and rabbis. These rabbis, including Jim Rudin, Maurice Davis, and Marc Tanenbaum, are of special interest because of the important role they played in their communities and because of their high visibility on the anticult stage more generally. At congressional and state level hearings, in press conferences, and in the media, rabbis acted as the primary voice pieces for the Jewish community on issues surrounding cults. They did not, however, merely add to the growing chorus of adults and community leaders expressing concerns about NRMs. Rather, they worked and thought within a specifically Jewish framework, they emphasizing threats to Jewish reproduction and the specificities of Jewish life. Jews concerned about the cults contended at the same time with the continuity crisis in American Judaism, and specifically with the loss of Jewish distinctiveness and the problem of assimilation. While the cults threatened the health and safety of all Americans, especially in as much as they preyed on youth, Jewish young people were considered especially vulnerable, and the threat to Judaism as a whole particularly existential. The cult threat—or at least the perception of one—forced Jewish leaders to articulate broader anxieties over relations with Christians, the future of Judaism, and the role of religion in the world.

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[126] Transcript of Proceedings, 78, Information Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States, Washington D.C., February 5, 1979, published by ACE-Federal Reporters, Inc.

Jewish participation in the cult wars underscores how a bipartisan and inter/multifaith movement, not only conservative backlash, unintentionally propped up the growing culture wars in the United States. Historian Healan Gaston, in her recent book on the history of the term "Judeo-Christian," argued that the roots of the culture wars lay in the 1940s and 1950s, when a sense of American identity as centrally religious one, and one opposed to dangerous secularism and godlessness took hold, rather than in the 1960s and 1970s.[127] Indeed, the cult wars bridged the bipartisan Cold War fears of totalitarianism, brainwashing, and the destruction of American life and the more partisan, narrowly conservative culture wars which fought against the decay caused by social and cultural liberalism in the US since the 1960s. In other words, the cult wars helped produce the culture wars by bringing together a longer-standing, postwar bipartisan coalition in service of conservative goals of religious orthodoxy and the preservation of family values.

Jewish anticult activism served a critical role shaping the cult wars and promoting the idea that NRMs threatened many communities and ways of life across the political and religious spectrum. In some ways, Jewish responses to the cult scare came from liberal impulses: the desire to protect the rights of individuals from mind control and totalitarianism emerged from rabbis who came from liberal denominations of Judaism, specifically the Reform movement.[128] Many of them had cut their political teeth through interfaith organizing around civil rights issues; they did not consider themselves political or religious conservatives. At the same time, concerns about the integrity of the family motivated Jewish anticult activism in ways that linked their activism to the broader cult, and culture, wars. Jewish mobilization of family values centered on concerns about assimilation and intermarriage, rather than a conservative Christian veneration of male breadwinners and stay-at-home mothers, but it featured a shared sense that the cults' main danger lay in their capacity to "fragment" families, to quote Maurice Davis.[129] Although Jewish fears of cult recruitment primarily reflected ongoing communal tensions around assimilation to white, Christian American norms, it also contained echoes of conservative Christian concerns about the incursion of secular humanism.[130]

Rabbis fought against cults on two fronts: in defense of the Jewish family, and in defense of legitimate American religions. They were not only concerned with defending their own religious or communal way of life, but they were also invested in protecting American democracy and liberalism from foreign totalitarian threats. Many of them had come of age around and after World War II, and they saw interfaith collaboration as a critical means of fighting communism and Naziism, and asserting the important role of Jews as a mainstream American faith. In the 1950s, with the onset of the Cold War, these efforts turned toward the threat of "godless" communism, as a robust sense of normative tri-faith Americanism largely

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[127] K. Healan Gaston, *Imagining Judeo-Christian America: Religion, Secularism, and the Redefinition of Democracy* (University of Chicago Press, 2019), 16.

[128] The Reform movement is the largest Jewish denomination in the United States, and the most politically and theologically liberal. In contrast, Conservative and Orthodox Judaism maintained more "traditional" practices and beliefs after these branches split with the reformers in the nineteenth century.

[129] Maurice Davis, "Special Report: the Cultic Proselytization of Our Youth," Yearbook of the Annual Convention of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, edited by Elliot L. Stevens, June 1977, 38, from American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

[130] According to Andrew Hartman, many Christian conservatives feared that secular humanism—an anti-Christian ideology—was being taught in schools. It replaced communism as the main "alien ideology" conservatives and Christians railed against during the culture wars. For more on this, see Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 78.

brought Catholics and Jews into the previously Protestant-dominated fold.[131] Then in the 1950s and 1960s, coalitions of Protestants, Jews, and Catholics had joined together to fight state and extralegal oppression of African Americans in the South. In the 1970s a similar interfaith cohort coalesced to fight the cults. The fact that interfaith-oriented rabbis were especially active in fighting the cults was not coincidental—a commitment to religious pluralism required both an ecumenical willingness to accept the faith of others, but also a clear delineation between these faiths. NRMs, with their unconventional theologies, which often borrowed liberally from existing major religions and reinterpreted their ideas in unorthodox ways, threatened these clear boundaries.

Reflecting the broader ACM, the UC attracted special attention from rabbis and Jewish community groups. But Jewish community leaders and groups also turned inward, and worked to diagnose the cult problem more broadly by addressing alienation, loneliness, and the failure of modern Jewish communities to retain their youth. The stakes of the debates were truly existential for many parents, as concerns over NRM membership was tied to the perceived continuity crisis for American Jews. NRM conversion became linked to intermarriage with gentiles as twin threats that endangered the very survival of Judaism itself. Anticult activism necessitated interfaith collaboration, but it would also prove challenging to the tenets of acceptance and pluralism that guided this work. The NRM issue, and especially that of Christian NRMs seeking to recruit Jews, proved especially fraught during the 1970s which saw complex relations between Christians and Jews.

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Rabbis and Jewish parents were involved in anticult activity from the early days of the 1970s, showing special concern and vitriol towards so-called messianic Judaism—a religious belief system that claimed to be Jewish but also believed that Jesus was the messiah—and the Unification Church. Anti-messianic activity fit squarely within a Jewish framework, but special attention to the UC promoted alliances across faith lines and with the broader ACM. Jewish organizations ramped up their response to the cult threat in the latter half of the 1970s, as the situation seemed increasingly dire not just for Jews but in general as groups like the UC received increasing scrutiny and press. In 1976, the American Jewish Committee's Department for Interreligious Affairs began to loudly proclaim their opposition to nefarious cult/NRM activity, often in conjunction with Christian colleagues. These efforts were led by the department's director, Marc Tanenbaum, and his co-director A. James (Jim) Rudin. They engaged in a very public dispute with the Unification Church at the end of 1976, during which they charged Moon's teachings with antisemitism. From then, the organization continued to give special attention to the Unification Church, but also went after Jews for Jesus and the "Hebrew Christian" groups as well as the more diffuse and nefarious cult threat at large. The AJC and other groups, like the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC, a community organization with chapters all over the country), and others committed serious time and resources to the issue of cults, especially as they related to

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[131] See Gaston, *Inventing Judeo-Christian America*, 194; Kevin M. Schultz, *Tri-Faith; America: How Catholics and Jews Held Postwar America to Its Protestant Promise* (Oxford University Press, 2011); Wendy Wall, "Symbol of Unity, Symbol of Pluralism: The 'Interfaith Idea' in Wartime and Cold War America," in *Making the American Century: Essays on the Political Culture of 20th -Century America,* ed. Bruce J. Schulman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Jewish youths. They conducted studies, held hearings, created and distributed lesson plans and curricula, solicited stories and resources from families affected by NRMs, and so on. While these groups generally avoided condoning the more forceful and legally questionable practice of deprogramming, they tended to echo the alarmist rhetoric of anticult groups, lumping together all NRMs as forces of totalitarianism, greed, abuse, and spiritual bankruptcy.

The first vocal and visible Jewish opponent of the Unification Church was Maurice Davis. A rabbi from White Plains, NY, Davis had been active in civil rights-era interfaith efforts on the part of American Jewish institutions to aid the plight of African Americans. By the 1970s, however, Davis had turned his attention to what he saw an urgent threat to the well-being of Jewish youth—the growth of cults and missionary movements. While many rabbis largely concerned themselves with the activities of the latter, Davis was most squarely focused on the Unification Church, in large part because he shared its center of operations in Westchester, New York. To his allies, Davis seemed an early augur of the violence and danger of the cult threat to come, and by the 1980s was perhaps the most visible anticult rabbi, receiving accolades from all the major anticult organizations and speaking nationally.[132] In 1970 Davis began working with congregants whose children had been recruited into the UC. In 1972 Davis founded Citizens Engaged in Reuniting Families (CERF), a national organization aimed at countering the Unification Church. CERF's name turned the UC's own ideology against it, accusing Moon's movement not of unifying the world but of tearing apart families—only community spiritual leaders and families themselves could achieve the reunification so desperately needed by lost American youths.

In an address given in February of 1979, Rabbi Davis gave his own account of how his involvement with the cults began in front of an audience of Jewish leaders who were "professionally involved with youth," at a conference co-sponsored by the National Religious Department of Canadian Jewish Congress and B'nai B'rith Hillel Foundation.[133] Davis often told the story of two congregants approaching him for help—each had a child who had joined the Unification Church while in college at Albany State University. While one of the youngsters had no trouble getting out of the movement, the second presented a much larger challenge for her family and Rabbi Davis. Davis painted in dramatic detail his experience of visiting her at a Moonie house in Queens in order to extract her. Though he had confirmed her, he "had difficulty recognizing her. I don't mean that her body had changed. It was the eyes, the little plastic smile and the eyes out of focus."[134] When he asked her a question, she would run out of the room, frantically claiming that she needed to pray. Rabbi Davis sat with her, noting that "we held each other's hands because we love each other," as he tried to understand her experience and bring her back to Westchester, to her family, and to the Jewish faith. His story represents a literal and symbolic battle between the young woman's new religious identity and the religion of her youth, between her chosen (either of her own free will or not) family and the biological family/community in which she grew up. Davis was able to convince her to go with him, but after weeks of psychiatric evaluation and prayer, she escaped and returned to the Unification Movement. Davis would remain haunted by what he viewed as his own failure to extract her from Moon's church. That same year, Rabbi Davis along with families and former NRM

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[132] Davis, along with Father James LeBar who also worked closely with the AJC, were the recipients of the 1982 Leo Ryan Award from CAN (Cult Awareness Network), the nation's largest anticult organization.

[133] Address by Maurice Davis on Cults, February 18 1979, Cults Nearprint, Nearprint Special Topics Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[134] Davis address, 2.

members formed CERF. The group's mission was comprised of four planks: publicity, the enactment of congressional legislation, extraction of recruits from NRMs, and support for parents of children in NRMs.[135] While Davis was credited with founding the group and was long associated with it, he claimed in this address that he stepped aside after a couple of years because "it was time for a Christian to run it."[136]

Davis saw the Unification movement's recruitment tactics, and goals of political and financial (and maybe sexual) exploitation, as its most dangerous elements. He made a point to mention Reverend Moon's purported affinity for "sex orgies."[137] Davis claimed, as Bob Dole and other anticult politicians had done, that the group was not really religious—this was a cover in order to gain protections under the First Amendment—but was in fact a political and financial institution. His concern came not only from his duties as a religious leader, but as an American. Davis stressed the group's problematic politics and increasing power in the political arena both domestically and intentionally. He repeated common tropes about the group—about how many of their organizations were fronts for political activity; how they were directly connected to the Korean CIA and the South Korean government; how they lined the pockets of senators and congressmen in the Republican party. But as with the group's theology, the politics were not really a draw for kids who joined the movement. "Now our kids," Davis claimed, "might go and march for McCarthy or something, but would never get involved with the little white envelopes which are used to bribe senators and congressmen."[138] The normal, middle class American youth getting mixed up with Moon and his cadre were innocents, lonely idealists made to feel loved in the movement. They would never voluntarily participate in bribery, espionage, and the corruption of the American political system. Partially this stemmed from the poverty of political activist causes, in contrast with the inspiration provided by the civil rights movement of previous decades: "In the 50's, in the early 60's there were causes. I marched with King from Selma to Montgomery. We marched on Washington. Every time you had a cause you had brothers and sisters (who shared a common interest in the cause)." But then came the mistrust of government, and the price of loneliness and alienation, also pointed out by Students for a Democratic society and other New Left groups.[139] Young people, rightly, felt betrayed: "McCarthy lied to them, Johnson lied to them, Nixon lied to them. They killed John Kennedy, they killed Robert Kennedy, they killed Martin Luther King and the campuses closed up. The kids turned inwards, went to the meditative groups. Again, lonely. Again, lonely. Constantly."[140] Thus Davis blamed not only Jewish parents but the paucity of political leadership and progress, rather than crediting NRMs themselves, for the problems facing Jewish—and American—youths.

NRMs did not only cause alarm because they attracted vulnerable youth—some rabbis claimed that the groups were explicitly antisemitic in their theology and worldview. One 1977

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[135] Davis address, 2.
[136] Davis address, 4.
[137] Davis address, 4, 7.
[138] Davis address, 8.
[139] The Port Huron Statement, a manifesto published by Students for a Democratic Society in June of 1962, remains the most famous and forceful statement of the ways in which the New Left was thinking about the dissatisfaction of young people in the 1960s. Written largely by Tom Hayden, a student at the University of Michigan, the statement reflected on the challenges faced by baby boomers and stated values of the New Left, including prizing and respecting others, destroying the unjust status quo, and promoting participatory democracy. See "Original Draft of the Port Huron Statement," *Resistance and Revolution: The Anti-Vietnam War Movement at the University of Michigan, 1965-1972*: http://michiganintheworld.history.lsa.umich.edu/antivietnamwar/items/show/128.
[140] Address by Maurice Davis on Cults, February 18 1979, Cults Nearprint, Nearprint Special Topics Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio, 13.

report commissioned by the Jewish Community Relations Council report took the broadest approach, representing the view that antisemitism was a necessary facet of the cults. Cults were inherently "intolerant of 'established' religions and of one another." While this meant that Judaism generally received the same treatment as any other organized religion, the report made sure to point out the most notorious Christian offshoot NRMs of the 1970s, the Children of God, led by David Berg, and the Unification Church. They cite a publication by Berg, entitled Israel Invaded! Armageddon on its Way!, as evidence of his antisemitism.[141] Published in the wake of the Yom Kippur War in 1973, Berg's piece heralds the conquest of Israel and the destruction of America, as an act of God's vengeance. The task force had many Berg quotes to choose from: Berg's Mo Letters (as he called his dispatches to followers) were riddled with anti-Semitic sentiments and conspiracy theories. Berg claimed Jewish ancestry, and seemed initially to embrace this identity and showed an interest in the Kibbutz movement. In fairly short order, though, Berg turned toward both forming allegiances with leaders in the Islamic world, and also began to disseminate anti-Jewish theories, including Holocaust denials and seemingly contradictory statements that the Jews manufactured the Hitlerian project and that God had sent Hitler as a means of divine retribution.[142] Given the myriad of horrific statements to cull from Berg's writings, perhaps the task force hoped to show its readers that not only were the Children of God opposed to the project of Israel and thus the autonomy of the Jewish people, but that also they hoped for the destruction of America, thus linking the fates of the Jewish people, Israel, and the United States.

While Children of God caused concern, the Unification Church provoked the most sustained campaign against perceived anti-Semitism among NRMs. At the tail end of 1976, the AJC published "Jews and Judaism in Rev. Moon's Divine Principle," written by Jim Rudin. The treatise on antisemitism in the Unification movement's central text, *The Divine Principle*, kicked off an caustic debate between the Rudin and the Church. The document began with an acerbic introduction by Marc Tanenbaum, who put forth a vision of the document's target audience. First, Tanenbaum spoke with an eye toward the interfaith community: the statement was not an indictment of antisemitism among Christians, but rather intended to point out the difference between the Moonies and legitimate Christian groups. Tanenbaum minced no words. He first called on both Jews and Christian to vigilantly combat the "Moon virus":

> At a time when the majority of enlightened Christian leadership throughout the world is laboring to uproot the sources of the pathology of anti-Jewish hatred which culminated in the Nazi Holocaust, Rev. Moon appears to be embarked on a contrary course of seeking to reinfect the spiritual bloodstream of mankind with his cancerous version of contempt for Jews and Judaism. On this level, therefore, this document is published as a clinical diagnosis intended to expose the Moon infection in order that both Christian and Jewish leadership will be vigilant to the need for combatting any effort of Rev. Moon and his followers to enter the

[141] Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia, "The Challenge of the Cults: a Report of the Special Committee on Exotic Cults," July 1978, Cults Nearprint, Nearprint Special Topics Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati. (Page 12)
[142] David E. Van Zandt, *Living in the Children of God* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1991), 23.

> mainstream of American religion and culture with his horrendous baggage of bigotry.[143]

Tanenbaum went on to explain that not only should people be concerned about Moon as Christians and Jews, but as Americans and guardians of democracy. He explicitly charged that the Unification movement posed a totalitarian threat, whose ideological "antecedents trace back to the Nazis and Stalinist Communism." Moon, like his totalitarian forebears, deployed antisemitism as a "cynical" means of speeding an "apocalyptic goal" to undermine democracy and truly held religious values.[144] He called on all politicians approached by Moon to be aware of his group's aims, which amounted to nothing less than the annihilation of the positive aspects of American and Western civilization. Finally, Tanenbaum addressed his statement to the "consciences of Jewish young people" who had "incredibly" become the latest targets of "totalitarian brainwashing" by Moon's organization. Ultimately, Tanenbaum felt that the information presented by the AJC's report offered a stark choice for Jewish converts to Moon's movement: "Jewish youth must confront the evidence of this document whose central message is that they are being asked to find salvation in a "third Messiah" whose gospel is the hatred for and destruction of their own people, their religion and culture, their very families."[145]

Rudin's report reads as almost clinical in its language after Tanenbaum's blistering introduction. Rudin methodically examined the *Divine Principle*, extracting every quote about Jews contained therein. He claimed that the central text of the Unification movement revealed "an orientation of almost unrelieved hostility toward the Jewish people," who were referred to often and by way of gross generalization.[146] Rudin took care not only to point out specific anti-Semitic content in the *Divine Principle* but to affirm recent statements of mainline Catholic and Protestant groups that there was no biblical basis for antisemitism and which encouraged Christians and Jews to work together. He also made the point that the Protestant National Council of Churches' Faith and Order Commission investigations found the *Divine Principle* problematic in its treatment of Jews, and generally in its attempts at biblical interpretation. Jorge Lara-Braud, the executive director of this commission teamed up with the AJC to generate further public uproar about the Unification Movement and antisemitism in the months that followed. Rudin and Tanenbaum in this report thus sounded alarms about the dangers of the Unification Movement while also affirming and relying on the legitimacy of their Christian allies. In doing so, they reinforced the importance of interfaith work both for fighting the cult threat and for more broadly the survival of the Jewish people.

The Unification Church released a statement that aimed to respond to the AJC's analysis and deny any bad faith on the part of Moon's followers. Its response began with a chilly but direct indictment that "various limitations inherent in the report have kept this response from becoming either as comprehensive or as reconciliatory as would otherwise be desirable."[147] Though the church was adamant that its members evinced no antisemitism, it attempted to contextualize the anti-Jewish sentiment that did plague the *Principle* in a couple of ways. First, it

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[143] Marc Tanenbaum, in A. James Rudin, "Jews and Judaism in the Rev. Moon's Divine Principle," December 1976, American Jewish Committee Digital Archive, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/7A35.PDF, 1.
[144] Tanenbaum, "Jews and Judaism in the Rev. Moon's Divine Principle," II.
[145] Tanenbaum "Jews and Judaism in the Rev. Moon's Divine Principle," II.
[146] Rudin, "Jews and Judaism in the Rev. Moon's Divine Principle," I.
[147]Unification Church Department of Public affairs and Unification Theology Study Group, "RESPONSE TO A. JAMES RUDIN'S REPORT "JEWS AND JUDAISM IN REVEREND MOON'S *DIVINE PRINCIPLE*"" March 1977, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/7A44.PDF, 1.

claimed that the text was not "written" by Moon, per se, but was rather an attempt to synthesize his teachings that necessarily had to be understood in the context of postwar Korean Christianity. There were so few Jews in Korea, it claimed, that any antisemitism in the text was in fact inconsequential to actual communities or individuals. It agreed that in a society such as the US where antisemitism was indeed a problem, the church should take active steps to combat it, but it regretted the "hateful" tone of Rudin's polemic. Overall, it contrasted what it saw as the AJC's smear campaign, clearly meant to elicit negative press attention, to the "pluralistic" and charitable reading the church should receive as a legitimate religious organization. The UC took out a full page ad in the New York *Times* on December 19, 1976, in an attempt to categorically and publicly refute charges of antisemitism. Attributed to Moon himself and addressed to his "Jewish Brethren," the ad emphasized his past public commitments to the state of Israel and the importance of strong ties between the US, Korea, and Israel. Moon also condemned the Holocaust, cited the centrality of Israel and the Jews to the containment of the Soviets, and insisted that the church was committed to peace in the world through the establishment of a brotherhood of nations, and as such would choose unity over national divisions.[148]

Marc Tanenbaum responded briskly that if Moon meant what he said in the ad, that the church should remove egregious passages from the *Divine Principle*, and follow the majority of influential Christian leaders in decrying antisemitism in all its forms—cultural, social, and theological. Moon, Tanenbaum insisted, must not participate in "replanting these poisonous weeds which so many faithful people have labored over decades to uproot."[149] Tanenbaum was not satisfied to let the matter rest here. He warned that while their analysis was limited to antisemitism in Moon's teachings, that did not mean that the AJC "was not equally concerned about the proselytizing activities and the reputed 'mind conditioning' methods of indoctrination practiced by Rev. Moon and his followers, as well as their ideological stance which appears to be a religious justification of regimes that practice oppression and denial of human rights."[150]

In addition to decrying NRM antisemitism and teaming up with religious leaders outside of Judaism, many Jews looked inward to understand and address the cult issue. Community leaders and groups spent considerable time and resources in the 1970s trying to diagnose the problem that confronted them. Why were Jewish kids so susceptible to cult recruitment? What did their home and community lives lack that they sought elsewhere? What were the implications of this trend for Jewish life and the future of the Jews in America? Like their non-Jewish counterparts, Jewish observers had a sense that there was a larger cultural problem at hand with regard to alienation, political unrest, and the decline of society at large. But more specifically they worried about changes within Jewish life, namely assimilation and the problem of intermarriage with non-Jews. All of their concerns contributed to the broader cult scare and the increasingly vocal group of Americans who felt that their kids needed defending against destructive cultural forces.

Community and religious organizations thus commissioned studies, reports, and conferences to define, discuss, and try to solve the problem of the new cults for Jewish life. In 1977, the Jewish Community Relations Council (JCRC) of Philadelphia released a lengthy report on cults and their implications for Jews. The result of a task force assembled the year before, the JCRC's report became widely cited and the basis for much Jewish anticult analysis after its

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[148] Unification Church full-page ad, *New York Times*, December 16, 1976.
[149] Statement by Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum on Rev. Moon's Statement in NY Times Ad, 20 December 1976, American Jewish Committee Digital Archive, http://www.ajcarchives.org/AJC_DATA/Files/7A36.PDF, 2.
[150] Tanenbaum's response to UC *NY Times* ad.

publication. Divided into two parts (findings and recommendations), the report reproduced the tone of urgency by beginning with a grim diagnosis. Far from merely "eccentric and innocuous," religious fringe groups were "troubling, and perhaps dangerous, addition[s] to the psychological landscape of America."[151] Though they were dangerous to all Americans, the Jewish community was at special risk.

The JCRC report tackled the question of assimilation head-on. It noted the many commentators who claimed that there was in fact no cult problem as such, but rather a problem with living in a "pluralistic society" in which youngsters are "weak in their Jewish knowledge." This line of thinking, they claimed, led to the conclusion that any force that pulled Jews away from Jewishness could be seen as cult-like. While they rejected this view, insisting that the cult problem was a unique one, it remained under the umbrella of assimilation. Thus, many of their recommendations involved education, specifically through efforts to "help in strengthening Jewish knowledge and Jewish identity generally."[152] This weak sense of Jewishness contributed to an overall sense of alienation and isolation. The report cites findings from a number of studies, including an investigation conducted by Maurice Davis and the task force at the Central Conference of American Rabbis the year before, to argue that young Jews were joining cults at disproportionately high rates. Why might this be so? Evoking a common trope, young Jews were cast as victims of their parents' success. The vast majority of cult members, as anticult literature often mentioned, came from affluent, white, middle class, and highly educated backgrounds. Thus it was unsurprising that Jews would be especially susceptible to cult recruitment, as many Jewish families tended to be economically and educationally successful. Like Rabbi Davis, the JCRC found that "Loneliness and the Need for Friendship" acted as the most decisive factor in young people joining cults, rather than any real theological or ideological content. They cited the practice of "love-bombing," ubiquitous among "virtually every cult," in which a new recruit was made to feel special and wanted by the group in a way they have been missing in everyday life. Once again, the JCRC did not so much blame the recruit themselves or even the cult, but rather the failings of society for creating a situation ripe for recruitment. Any adolescent, of course, might experience "confusion, insecurity, and self-doubt." In modern American society though—a world of "singles bars, teenage suicides, television, and multiversities," such a sense of "loneliness and alienation has reached epidemic proportions."[153] The JCRC was scathing in its indictment of the ability of Jewish institutions to keep a hold on Jewish youngsters but also acknowledged some positive appeal in the groups.

The report made sure to point out what the committee viewed as the main feature of cult life: an authoritarian structure and tendency to supplant freewill and questioning with total devotion to a group's leader and cause. In order to be classified as a cult, the report argued, a group needed a living leader who demanded "complete and literal acceptance" of their claims; "complete, unquestioning loyalty and allegiance"; and "complete and total willingness to obey the cult leader's command." These groups were "by definition undemocratic, absolutist." The report thus emphasized how complete and total the influence of the leader had to be over his followers. These groups did not merely offer benign doctrines or blueprints for living a good life, and they were not philosophies to be integrated into one's outlook. Instead, by their very nature, cults demanded the subsuming of individual will and actions to the needs of the group, which

[151] 1977 JCRC report, Introduction, Nearprint Special Topics Collection, AJA.
[152] JCRC report, 3.
[153] JCRC report, 20.

really meant the needs or desires of the leader.[154] The implications of this were clear, and stated explicitly several pages later: "the closest structural analogy to the cults is that of a dictatorship or totalitarian state." The problem for the JCRC then was structural—they admitted that though it would be in theory possible to have a benign dictatorship, and that indeed cult membership seemed to make some people happy, the fact of their fundamentally antidemocratic nature meant that every one of these groups "has the potential to be as bad as the worst of them so long as it operates on the assumption that the word of the cult leader supercedes (sic) the rule of law and the restraints of conventional morality."[155]

In another report, cited by the JCRC, Maurice Davis offered a similar set of explanations for the appeal of the cults, but offered more radical ideas about the autonomy of young people and their civil liberties. 1977, the Central Conference of American Rabbis held its 88th annual convention in Grossinger, NY. The aim of the conference was to bring together Reform rabbis from across the US, solidifying goals and ideas of Reform movement leadership. The convention's proceedings covered many topics, including reports on issues from homosexuality, interfaith work, and the relationship of the Reform movement to Israel and international politics. Maurice Davis chaired the Committee on Cults was asked to speak on its findings regarding the pressing issue of the effect of "cult" activity on Jewish youth. Under the auspices of the committee, Davis presented a special report on "the Cultic Proselytization of Our Youth." The report distinguished between groups referred to as "the cults"—including not only the Unification movement but also Children of God and Scientologists—and the missionaries like Jews for Jesus. While he agreed that both classes were "dangerous…[and] deceitful," they fundamentally differed in their aims. Groups like Jews For Jesus were primarily interested in converting Jews to Christianity—and thus had essential religious aims—whereas the cults were, "politically and/or financially motivated."[156] In other words, they were not really religions in the first place.

Davis shared the widely felt sense among many in the Jewish community that the problem was not really a theological one, but a matter of alienation more generally. He claimed that Jewish young people were not drawn to Moon and other charismatic leaders because of the appeal of their actual beliefs, but rather that it was "the other victims" and thus the promise of community which lured them. During the early stages of their recruitment, the "victim" might have seen an idyllic social world of order and harmony unavailable to them elsewhere. Willing to do anything for access to this sort of fulfillment, eventually "the kid sells his soul for the security of slavery."[157] Teenagers, products of suburbanization and other types of massive societal change "are about the loneliest people in town." Gone were the days of the ethnic enclave, as these children are the "product of nuclear homes instead of extended homes. They do not have any neighborhoods." The solution to the malady of the teenage soul—and thus the cult problem—lay with the family. Indeed, modern society's inability to serve the needs of family was largely responsible for the situation in which many found themselves and their children. "We," wrote Davis of American society, "go about fragmenting the family." While there were youth programs, and those that cater to brothers and sisters, there is "nothing for the family….we fragment them in every way." For Davis, the transition toward the nuclear family and away from

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[154] JCRC report, 4.
[155] JCRC report, 11.
[156] Davis, "Special Report on the Cultic Proselytization of Our Youth," CCAR yearbook, AJA, 31-32.
[157] Davis, CCAR report, 37.

a more extended model of neighborhoods and community was itself a process of fracture, perpetuated by a lack of attention to and intergenerational services for families.

One core aspect of this process as it related to the issue of cults was the way in which groups like the ACLU promoted "the facile distinction between minor and adult." Like others in the anticult camp, Davis participated in a collapsing of distinct meanings of the word child: childhood as a phase of life vs. a child as offspring. He dismissed the legal rights of those recently granted full rights as eighteen-year-olds, and rather chose to see these people as members of their family, though they were no longer considered children in the eyes of the law:

> I cannot abide the thought when a parent comes to me for help, and his child is seventeen and three quarters years old, I can help him. If, however, the kid is eighteen years old, I should tell the parents, 'Sorry, there is nothing that can be done. I don't believe this.'[158]

In claiming that society must discard such "facile" distinctions, Davis was essentially advocating for the empowerment of the biological family, supported by the wider community, at the expense of the individual rights of individuals legally considered adults with full rights.

Because the cult scare was so focused on young people and their futures, it is unsurprising that many turned their attention to education as an important means of inoculating children against the threat of cults. Community groups and leaders spent much time in the late 1970s producing educational materials, aimed at both Jewish adults and children, which would allow teachers to prepare students to counter cultic proselytization. Rabbis like self-proclaimed Hasidic "cultbuster" Shea Hecht and others wrote frequently about the importance inculcating youngsters with Jewish faith and culture through education within and outside of the home. Others then took up the task of producing programs that might be used in Jewish schools nationally. The United American Hebrew Congregations directed by Balfour Brickner, B'nai B'rith led by Esther Deitz, the CCAR, and the AJC all produced their own curricular programs to help Jewish teachers incorporate anticult education into the classroom. These programs ranged in length—some were meant to run as long as 16 weeks—and in which religious/cult groups they were primarily responding to. Some sought to answer "cults" in general, while others paid special attention to one group like the Unification Church. Many Jews were especially concerned, however, with the missionizing efforts of Christian groups who they saw masquerading as Jews, including Jews for Jesus and B'nai Yeshua. What most of these educational materials shared was a multipronged strategy for countering the cults, and the belief that social alienation, theological confusion, and a lack of solid Jewish education made youngsters (and some adults) especially vulnerable to cult recruitment. Thus they generally sought to clarify a couple of key issues: who were these cults? What, by contrast, was authentic Judaism? And how, finally, can Jewish kids and their communities defend against the incursions of these groups?

Some anticult rabbis creating and promoting these materials repeated their commitment to religious freedom and pluralism. These groups had every right to exist, they insisted. What they could not abide were the deceptive techniques deployed by the cults to recruit Jewish youth. Others focused more squarely on social alienation and problems felt by Jewish youngsters, and sought to connect kids to each other and to their Judaism. There were also other pamphlets and

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[158] Davis, CCAR report, 38.

resources produced explicitly for parents who sought to protect their families from the incursion of cults and other non-Jewish religious forces into their lives.

While they worried about the immediate spiritual, physical, and mental well-being of their children, families also looked toward future implications of their relatives' religious and personal choices. For many parents, concerns over cults were little more than a proxy for larger anxieties over marriage and procreation. Young Jewish people's decision to join NRMs had major implications not only for their own religious lives, according to some observers, but for the survival of the Jewish people as a whole. In this sense, the cult threat felt existential in proportion. As Ronit Stahl and her coauthors show in a recent article, the Christian Right had no monopoly on family values, which had in fact already been "embedded as an organizing principle" of Jewish life for decades by the 1970s.[159] After the 1960s, a wider "continuity crisis" emerged that made many question the future viability and proliferation of Jews and Judaism. In the wake of the feminist movement and other societal changes—namely, people marrying older and having fewer children—the threat of young people defecting to other religions and marrying non-Jews felt especially urgent. Some equated Jewish conversion and intermarriage as twin threats. In the Jewish press, the conversion of women in particular was often discussed in terms of its implications for Jewish motherhood. Even some who protested the pressures placed on women as a result of the perceived continuity crisis mobilized the specter of cult conversion in order to emphasize the real threats facing the Jewish community.

For some observers, like Hasidic rabbi Shea Hecht, cult recruitment and antisemitism were of a piece that led to the greatest existential threat facing the Jewish people: intermarriage. In his 1985 memoir *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, Hecht recounted his long career as a deprogrammer—a badge he wore more proudly than most more moderate anticult rabbis, who saw an association with deprogramming as toxic. He told stories of specific cases he had worked, intervening on the behalf most often of parents whose children had left to join all the major cult bogeymen. Hecht believed strongly that a loss of Jewish identity and distinctiveness was at the heart of all ills facing the Jewish family, from cult conversion to intermarriage. Cults were dangerous, but they were also symptomatic rather than causal. "The cults" he claimed, "are not a threat. Assimilation is. The cults cannot destroy the Jewish people. Assimilation can."[160] Assimilation left Jewish kids vulnerable to new religions and gentile spouses. Jewish education and a recommitment to the faith of their birth was the only chance they had for redemption.

Like Rudin, Tanenbaum, and other activist rabbis, Hecht insisted that he believed strongly in the rights of people to choose their own faith, and that people should practice their own religions so long as they kept to themselves, stymying dangerous missionary impulses that were at their core violently anti-Semitic and intolerant. He claimed that the very problem with the Unification Church, for instance, was that for it unity meant oneness/sameness which was necessarily predicated on conversion. For real Jews, "there was a truer way to unify mankind than by converting everyone to Judaism….And so we say to the Gentiles: Let us be Jews, and we will let you be gentiles."[161] Hecht used the analogy of neighbors to convey the point, claiming that unity came from peaceable neighborly coexistence rather than from spiritual sameness, which sought essentially to annihilate through absorption.

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[159] Lila Corwin Berman, Kate Rosenblatt, and Ronit Y. Stahl, "Continuity Crisis: The History and Sexual Politics of an American Jewish Communal Project," *American Jewish History* 104, no. 2 (2020): 173.
[160] Shea Hecht and Chaim Clorfene, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster* (Brooklyn, NY: Tosefos Media, 1985), 232.
[161] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 141.

Hecht emphasized his own racially tolerant views while maintaining that an over-commitment to racial liberalism without a strong sense of Jewish distinctiveness drew so many Jewish young people into new religions. The issue of intermarriage was at the heart of Hecht's morality tale. He recounted a call he received from a Jewish mother whose son had chosen to marry an African-American woman and to adopt her Pentecostal faith. Rabbi Hecht could not agree to attempt a deprogramming with the young man because he discerned that the mother's main issue was with the race of the woman he chose. "Listen, lady," Rabbi Hecht told the mother, "this is not a pro-segregation office. If you were to tell me that your son was going to marry a Black Jewish girl, I'd say '*Mazel tov.*' I'm in the business of bringing Jewish kids back to their roots and explaining to them that Jews should marry Jews, like it says in the Torah, and non-Jews should marry non-Jews."[162] Hecht thus tried to separate the question of intermarriage from one of race. Scholars like Lila Corwin-Berman and others have made it clear, however, that this is easier said than done.[163] It seems clear, even by Hecht's own accounting, that the same "Jewish kids" he hoped to keep in the fold seemed eager to find religious identities and communities that suited their own commitment to racial justice. He spoke of one "girl" who joined the group as a "way to express a true humanitarian attitude. After all, the Moonies call their religion the Unification Church, and in it are Blacks and whites and orientals (sic), and they are all treated as equals within the church." He could thus understand her urge to "express her "liberalism" by getting involved with this organization that just happens to be one of the most poisonous serpents on earth. This, I feel, is why the Moonies do so well at converting Jewish children."[164] Apparently, while Hecht conceded that non-racist attitudes were virtuous, when they were connected to a flimsy American liberalism rather than Jewish tradition, they could leave young people even further unmoored from the teachings of their youth and thus vulnerable to the siren song of Moon and other gurus.

Hecht went even further in his claim that intermarriage posed an existential threat to the Jewish people, explicitly drawing comparisons to the most recent and traumatic attempts at Jewish extinction. Hecht dedicated many of the last chapters of his book, ostensibly about his experience as a cultbuster, to what he deemed the "tragedy of intermarriage." When a Jewish person married a non-Jew, their children could never be truly Jewish. The unbroken lineage spanning millennia would be automatically broken. Any Jewish man who participated "unwittingly follows the same course of action as that of the most evil men in modern history—he eradicates the Jews."[165] The Jewish woman who commits a similar transgression is in a slightly different position, because of the importance of matrilineal descent. Hecht argued, however, that even if having a gentile father and a Jewish mother was less dangerous from a religious perspective, history had proven that these offspring remained a great threat to Jews. They were among the most "vicious anti-Semites and cruelest informers" during the Holocaust. According to Hecht, "no Jew-hater is so dangerous as a self-hating Jew. And no Jew is so self-hating as a half Jew."[166] That this language is nestled in a larger tale of extreme anticult activity is no coincidence. Assimilation had bred the impetus toward both intermarriage and conversion to non-Jewish religions. In the end, because of intermarriage, "the Jews will thus manage to do to

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[162] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 138.
[163] See Lila Corwin Berman, *Speaking of Jews: Rabbis, Intellectuals, and the Creation of an American Public Identity* (University of California Press, 2009), 161–65.
[164] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 139.
[165] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 148.
[166] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 149.

themselves what both Hitler and Stalin (their names should be blotted out) couldn't achieve—annihilation."[167] Both intermarriage and cult membership were caused by and resulted in a lack of Jewish distinctiveness and identity. Jewish education and the instilling of Jewish values and sense of selfhood remained the only safeguard against these twin perils.

For Hecht and others, cult recruitment reflected the failure on the part of Jewish parents to raise appropriately Jewish children. Unlike groups like the JCRC, Hecht's solutions to the cult problem did not center on legal or grassroots responses to the groups, but rather had to occur at the level of parenting. Jewish newspapers also reflected the sense that Jewish distinctiveness was under siege, and that this lack of a strong identity had grim implications for the Jewish population. Secularization and the assimilation of Jews into American society meant more frequent and perhaps intimate relationships between Jews and gentiles. One *Miami Herald* article from 1977 explicitly offered conversion and intermarriage as two sides of the same coin: "Evangelists, Intermarriage Undo Efforts to Keep Jews in the Fold."[168] Local rabbis expressed concerns that were nothing short of existential: intermarriage and conversion inevitably led to "a decline in the world Jewish population that threatens the future of Judaism." One orthodox rabbi, Dov Bidnick, cited Jews for Jesus and the Unification Church as examples of groups "steadily beating away at young kids." None of the Rabbis cited specific marriage practices of NRMs, or connected conversion to intermarriage explicitly—both phenomena, however, had the same effect and could be traced back to the same cause. According to Rabbi Ralph Kingsley, assimilation was the culprit. Declining anti-Semitism meant a proportional decline in a distinctively felt Jewish identity, he claimed, calling it "the price of freedom." Education, once again, was the solution to this threat—if young Jews knew more, they would be "less vulnerable to attraction" by unfamiliar religions. In addition, it was critical to discourage intermarriage. Rabbi Kingsley echoed Tanenbaum and other interfaith anticult activists in taking an approach that was at once seemingly pluralistic but also reiterated boundaries, insisting that intermarriage was a crucial issue "not because we are against Christians, but because the world needs Judaism to survive…the Jew is an endangered species." It was one thing to be a good neighbor, and quite another to share a home.

The press reported specific stories of *verklempt* Jewish parents, emphasizing the human emotional cost of intermarriage and conversion. These accounts emphasized not the failure of parents to inculcate Jewish morals in their children, but rather the pain and suffering caused by cults. Though the pain of parents is palpable and heart wrenching, their concerns varied from legitimate concerns for their children's well-being to panicked tribalism and even racism. One article in the *San Jose Mercury* from May 1979, featured the provocative headline: "Jewish woman to wed Black stranger in Moonie match."[169] The article presented the story of Silvia Vogel, whose daughter Ellen had become engaged to an African American man according to the will of Reverend Moon. The groom, George Whitfield, was mentioned only in reference to his race. Clearly a source of shock for his future mother-in-law, Silvia described her daughter's engagement as a "a hammer on the head and a knife in the heart." Ellen, for her part, told the *Mercury* that she had known for "about a year that I would marry a Black man," and that this aligned with the group's larger goal to "make the world's population a 'love race' through intermarriage." The article focused less on the beliefs and aims of the Unification Movement, or the personal experience of Ellen Vogel or George Whitfield, and more on the deep emotional

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[167] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 160.
[168] Brian Jones, "Evangelists, Intermarriage Undo Efforts to Keep Jews in the Fold," *Miami Herald,* April 21, 1978.
[169] AP, no author, "Jewish Woman to Wed Black Stranger in Moonie Match," *San Jose Mercury*, May 16, 1979.

distress the marriage, and her daughter's conversion more generally, had caused Silvia. She described how her daughter had been raised in a conservative Jewish household, and could recite prayers by memory without even having to open a prayer book. In the wake of her father's illness and death, however, teenage Ellen became a "loner" and began to exhibit "severe emotional problems." According to her mother, Ellen left home to join the Unification Church two days after her father's death, promising her mother "'I'm Jewish and I'll always be Jewish.'" The Vogels' story spoke to many tropes of the experience of NRM converts and their families: a tumultuous home life, emotional instability, familial disappointment and confusion, and broader societal disapproval. Ellen was painted as a troubled young woman betraying the deeply rooted values of her upbringing and worse, trespassing against her mother—the cults not only victimized converts, but their heartsick families. Some readers recognized the article's racial undertones. One from San Francisco, Leonard Roy Frank, did not mince words, writing that he was "revolted by the racist garbage which littered" the *Mercury's* piece on the Vogel family. Frank called out the article's "thinly disguised" racism.[170] In contrast to the case of Rabbi Hecht's would-be client whose son was engaged to a Black Pentecostal woman, the problem posited in the article was the Jewish daughter's lack of choice or agency in the matter.

Themes of enslavement and the constriction of bodily autonomy, especially for Jewish women, pervaded alarmist writing on cult recruitment. Ellen Vogel, a shell of her former self, gave her body over to a "Black stranger." Rabbis like Maurice Davis and Hecht used even more extreme language to convey the ways in which mind control necessarily led to bodily control. To help one young woman "escape" the Unification Church, Hecht enlisted to the help of a Black Jewish acquaintance name Elazar David. David, according to Hecht, drew a clear parallel between women's involvement in the cults and prostitution. Prostitutes, like innocent cult recruits, often came from successful backgrounds. They had everything going for them until one day "a man came along and spoke softly to them" until they became "so debased that whatever the pimp said, the girl would obey." This included selling sex and physical labor. David continued to address the young Moonie: "women I had known as nice little girls, once they got into the clutches of the pimps, they were dead…you were a good girl and somebody raped your mind, and you gave yourself completely over to him, and he told you to sell flowers for him, so you went out and sold flowers for him." In fact, Moon himself was no better than a pimp, and "you can be sure that if Moon thought he could get away with having the girls sell themselves instead of the flowers, that's what they would be doing."[171] This echoes a familiar anticult trope, wherein the body and mind were collapsed in order to make an analogy of NRM conversion to physical rape. Maurice Davis deployed a similar tactic during his testimony at the Dole hearings in 1979 when he compared Moon and other religious leaders to child molesters: "for as surely as there are those who lure children with lollypops in order to rape their bodies, so, too, are there those who lure children with candy-coated lies in order to rape their minds."[172] These analogies were used most often in the context of dangers posed specifically to women and children, rather than adult men.[173]

In their 1980 book, *Paradise or Prison*, Marcia and James Rudin echoed the specifically

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[170] Leonard Roy Frank, "P-O Should Not Have Reported Response of Mother of Moonie," *Jewish Post and Opinion*, June 15, 1979.
[171] Hecht, *Confessions of a Jewish Cultbuster*, 143-144.
[172] Davis, testimony at "Information Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States," February 5, 1979.
[173] For more on how narratives around NRMs focus on the sexual exploitation of (white) women and children, see Goodwin, *Abusing Religion*, 3.

gendered problems posed by NRMs, as they proclaimed the cults to be "antiwoman, antichild, and antifamily."[174] While concerns over children and families were an essential ingredient of all anticult activism, there was something feminist, or at least liberal, in the Rudins' claims about women in the groups. Excluded from positions of leadership or decision making, women performed only the most "menial" tasks of cooking, cleaning, and street solicitations. Nor did they have control over their physical and reproductive health, as access to "birth control, abortion, and the physical circumstances of childbirth" were generally controlled by the usually male leadership.[175] The Rudins also pointed out that the Unification Church's theology was at its core sexist because of its claims about Eve's intercourse with Satan as the root of "human's estrangement from God." Finally, they made sure to include familiar stories of sexual exploitation by groups like the Children of God, who were infamous for their practices of "flirty fishing," or forcing women members to use sex as a recruitment tool. Feminist critiques went hand in hand with those about families and children, mirroring but not replicating more conservative aspects of the cult scare that emphasized sexual exploitation and the endangerment of children as evidence that cults should be excluded from the mainstream religious fold.

Jewish families were not monoliths, and responses to family members joining NRMs were far from uniform. The most dire warnings about NRMs have left more marks in the archive, but it is clear that many people tried hard to understand their relatives' choices and to listen to their stories. One such example is the correspondence between Moses Lasky and his nephew, Ken. Ken joined the Unification Church in the early 1970s and communicated the ways in which church membership had changed his life: "I understand and experience God in new and more powerfull ways each day," he wrote to his uncle in 1973. "Inherent in this is a deeper and more meaningul realtionship with other people and a deeper understanding of myself (all sic)."[176] Moses did not respond that his nephew had been brainwashed or that he needed deprogramming. He encouraged Ken's spiritual journey, telling him "if the movement or activity gives you a sense of satisfaction, of fulfillment, or of ennoblement, continue with it." He even attended a speech by Reverend Moon in order to learn more about the movement. He noted that he did not understand Moon's appeal, but his words of support seemed genuine. Above all, though, he warned his nephew to keep an open mind. Whether a leader was evil like Stalin or Hitler, charismatic, or deeply moral, "the word from above, absorbed unqestioningly by followers may mesmerize and chloroform independent thought. Keep your mind open (sic)."[177] Lasky engaged with his nephew as a genuine convert and did not denigrate his choice. At the same time, the specter of mass political and social movements and the danger they posed remained front of mind, as they did for those more virulently opposed to any NRM recruitment.

A focus on keeping Jewish families intact and Jewish reproduction insular did not preclude interfaith collaboration in the cult wars and beyond. Interlocking causes of cult-fighting, interfaith solidarity, and civil rights for minorities reinforced each other for rabbis like Rudin, Tanenbaum, Davis, and others. In the 1940s Jewish clergy began an organized campaign to protect civil liberties and fight antisemitism through the bolstering of relationships with other

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[174] A. James Rudin and Marcia R. Rudin, *Prison or Paradise? The New Religious Cults* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1980), 24.
[175] Rudin and Rudin, *Prison or Paradise,* 24.
[176] Letter from his grandnephew to Moses Lasky, October 15, 1973, SC 6644, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[177] Letter from Moses Lasky to his grandnephew, February 14, 1974, SC 6644. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

clergy members and encouraging interfaith dialogue.[178] Among rabbis in the Reform movement, those involved in interfaith work tended toward especially strong anticult feelings. This is especially, but not exclusively, true of those involved in interfaith efforts under the auspices of the American Jewish Committee (AJC), in particular its interreligious affairs director, Marcus H. Tanenbaum, and Jim Rudin acting as deputy director. Many of those most involved in Jewish interfaith activities played an important role during the 1960s civil rights movement; by the 1970s, they had taken up the cults, and in particular the messianic Jewish groups, as a core issue.

While these rabbis shared concerns of family groups and others over the well-being of Jewish children, they were fixated more broadly on American Jewry itself. Thus, while they denounced the activities of the Moonies and the events at Jonestown, for instance, they fought most stridently against Jews for Jesus and other groups they saw as falsely purporting to be Jewish. Like their Christian counterparts—with whom they worked closely to combat the cult threat—these interfaith Jewish activists believed deeply in religious freedom and in the importance of religion to society, while also taking great umbrage at the notion that anything and everything counted as a religion according to a group's own self-definition. Just because someone claimed to be Jewish did not make them so.

Opposition to the UC, which they claimed was not only guilty of brainwashing and antisemitism but also of being at its core anti-democratic and totalitarian, brought Jewish anticult leaders into alliance with Christians. This fit into a longer history since the 1940s of interfaith activism against godless communists and in defense of the American nation. It is no coincidence that during this same period the concept of "Judeo-Christian" emerged as critical to American identity. At the same time, a central tenet of the Jewish anticult struggle—defending against Jews for Jesus and other messianic groups—could create conflict between Christians and Jews. The messianic Jews, who were essentially Christian, proved a stickier issue for Jewish-Christian anticult activism, as it forced them to confront the longer, painful history of Christian efforts to convert Jews. The messianics proved so problematic precisely because they blurred the lines between Jews and Christians, and rendered the very fundamental tenets of interfaith work—which relied on both cooperation and clearly bounded distinctions—murky if not obsolete. In other words, the nature of anticult activism mattered for interfaith coalition forming. Speaking out against the UC, Children of God, or other NRMs created opportunities for alliance with other religious leaders; confronting Jews for Jesus or other self-identified "Hebrew Christians" could be more fraught.

Although at first glance, civil rights, interfaith collaboration, and anticult ideas might seem like odd ideological bedfellows, they constituted a larger anti-totalitarian ideology. While those sympathetic to NRMs argued—often successfully, in court at least—that efforts to hinder the activities of the groups were tantamount to religious freedom violations, these anticult rabbis offered an opposite position. For them and their fellow civil rights-minded anticult allies like the African-American deprogrammer Ted Patrick, it was the cults who violated the civil and human rights of their recruits by brainwashing them and using covert tactics of mind control to diminish their decision-making capabilities. The cults were not persecuted religions, in their view—indeed, no one proclaimed more loudly their commitment to religious freedom than anticult advocates. Rather, NRMs were rackets using the veil of religion in order to hide their true aims of gaining financial and political power. These groups were not only religiously illegitimate, they were antidemocratic and deployed fascistic tactics in order to increase their power and control

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[178] Marc Dollinger, *Quest for Inclusion: Jews and Liberalism in Modern American* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 2000), 16.

over adherents. Thus, not only were they unworthy of protections afforded by the sacred commitment of the US to religious pluralism—they actively threatened that pluralism.

Many of the most vocal anticult rabbis had proven track records as civil rights activists in the 1950s and 1960s, including Davis, Marcus Tanenbaum, Jim Rudin, and Balfour Brickner. These rabbis cut their teeth campaigning for the southern civil rights struggle in the 1960s, and engaged in interfaith work through the 1960s and 1970s. Jim Rudin of the AJC, who would go on to be perhaps the most vocal advocate of interfaith anticult work, took an especially hard stance against legalized segregation and social and cultural racism, even considering the liberal orientation and at least theoretical commitment of most American Jews to civil rights.[179] Rudin, writing as a southern Jew, rejected accommodationist approaches to combatting racism in the South and nationwide. He wrote prolifically to those with whom he disagreed, whether in essays calling out wishy-washy liberals and Jews who sat by silently in the face of anti-Black racism or landlords who abdicated their responsibility to integrate apartment complexes. In an exchange with R. Hugh Uhlmann, a newspaper editor in Kansas City, Rudin laid out his problem with the hypocrisy of Northern Jewish liberals.

> "Each time that a 'White Liberal' indicates that integration must not begin in his own backyard; each time that he finds rationalization for inertia; each time that his attachment for his status quo seems to be the dominant impulse in his life, he is inciting to riot just as capriciously as the most benighted southern racist who shouts obscene words on a southern sidewalk; each time the pillars of a suburban northern community unite to resist the "intrusion" of Negro families or the integration of their schools, they fan 'the fire next time.'"[180]

Rudin's commitment to taking on problems without reservation in the name of justice extended to his work against cults. In matters of importance it was critical to take a hardline. Maurice Davis also committed himself to the cause of civil rights, marching with Martin Luther King Jr. during his famous march Selma to Montgomery, Alabama in 1965. Davis was also named an honorary chairman for the Indianapolis NAACP in recognition of his commitment to the struggle for racial equality.[181] Organizing against the cults, for these rabbis, did not come from a quiet commitment to prejudice or the maintenance of a racially or religiously homogenous America. Nor was it a cover for anti-liberal principles or deep-seated conservativism. Rather, they saw themselves as fighting for freedom against illiberalism.

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[179] Historian Mark Dollinger, in his book, *The Quest for Inclusion,* has written about the challenges faced by Jews, in particular those in the American South, to uphold liberal ideals that helped guarantee Jewish freedom, survival, and success while at the same time preserving their status as increasingly assimilated white Americans. For southern Jews, this was often a matter of personal safety—to actively protest legalized segregation and racial terror was to potentially evoke violent responses from their white gentile neighbors. Northern Jews were freer to support the Black freedom struggle in the 1950s and 1960s, but remained mostly committed to an accommodationist liberal approach. By the time the struggle for racial equality and inclusion came in full force to the north in the mid-1960s, Jews were less likely to focus explicitly on the political, legal, and social plight of African Americans, and turned inward, mobilizing the Black Power strategy of ethnic nationalism and fighting for the rights of Jews qua Jews.

[180] Letter from A. James Rudin to R. Hugh Uhlmann, April 10, 1964, box 1, folder 1. MS 782. A. James Rudin Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[181] For more on Davis's civil rights activism in Indianapolis, see Krista Kinslow, "The Road to Freedom Is Long and Winding: Jewish Involvement in the Indianapolis Civil Rights Movement," *Indiana Magazine of History* 108, no. 1 (2012): 1–34.

The work of liberals like Jim Rudin and Marc Tanenbaum, the top two directors of the American Jewish Committee's Department of Interreligious Affairs, served a critical role in the Reform effort within the cult wars. Working under the auspices of an interfaith organization, their concerns over cults reflected the major themes of the Reform movement's anticult activism, and fell squarely within secular and religious anticult discourses. Their powerful and frequent statements against the cults evoked the importance and fragility of Christian/Jewish relations, political fears of the totalitarian threat posed by cults, and the special dangers NRMs presented to Jewish children and thus the Jewish family. While they expressed special concern with messianic Jewish groups like Jews for Jesus, these interfaith leaders were concerned about cults generally, in particular with Christian offshoot groups, with the Unification Church attracting the most ire.

These rabbis often framed the struggle against the UC as one against hate itself. In the wake of the conflict with the UC in which Rudin and Tanenbaum accused *The Divine Principle* of promoting antisemitism, the two enlisted Christian leaders to publicly denounce the UC. At a conference in early 1977, the AJC and its allies made a forceful statement about the Unification Church, which it called "anti-Democratic, anti-Jewish, and in direct conflict with basic Christian teaching."[182] The group included Jorge Lara-Braud, of the NCC Faith and Order commission, and Fr. James LeBar, county coordinator of the office of communications, Catholic Archdiocese of New York. LeBar was a prominent Catholic anticult activist who Rudin cited in the original AJC statement about the Divine Principle. As part of the this campaign, LeBar sent out a letter to all priests in the Archdiocese of New York warning of the "acute dangers" of Moon's movement. In sum, fears surrounding cults and their nefarious beliefs and social potentials created space for the interfaith collaboration of mainstream Christian and Jewish groups, as well as an opportunity for Christian allies to show their commitment to fighting anti-Semitism.

While unconventional religious and spiritual organizations had been recruiting Jewish youth and catching the eye of Jewish parents since the 1960s, the founding of Jews for Jesus in 1973 raised new alarms. Moishe Rosen began the group in San Francisco in 1973, blending the tongue-in-cheek humor and new media tactics of the counterculture with an emphasis on the possibility of being both Jewish and Christian. In a spiritual marketplace that prized creativity, individual engagement, and the syncretic potentials of different religious traditions, Jews for Jesus might have seemed a hip alternative to either a more traditional Judaism or the strictly and explicitly Christian Jesus People movements that became popular in the late 1960s. Jews for Jesus never attracted massive numbers, but they and other so-called Hebrew Christian and messianic Jewish groups (who claimed Jewish identity but also believed that Jesus Christ was the messiah) caused an outsized panic in Jewish communities.

Jews and Christians agreed that the cults, and in particular the messianic Jewish groups, posed a common danger. In working together to combat this threat, Jewish and Christian leaders attempted to reaffirm their commitment to interfaith work and delineated clear bonds of orthodoxy and differentiation between their respective religious traditions. Some Christian groups expressed distrust for these movements including the evangelical B'nai Yeshua (Son of Jesus) group because they "mix[ed] religious symbols in ways which distort their essential meaning" and engaged in "alleged dishonest conversionary tactics," according to one statement made by the in 1977 by the Long Island Council of Churches.[183] Alongside Jews for Jesus, B'nai Yeshua was the source of constant controversy, which came to a head in 1978 when President Carter's sister, Ruth Carter Stapleton, agreed to provide the keynote address at the group's annual

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[182] "Moon's Movement Bigoted, Christians and Jews Agree," *B'nai B'rith Messenger,* Jan 7, 1977.
[183] George Cornell, "'Jews for Jesus': A Kosher Campaign?", *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1977.

convention. Jewish and Christian leaders once again joined to denounce Stapleton's involvement. Marc Tanenbaum went as far as to say that she was threatening "the spiritual liquidation of the Jews."[184] He also gestured toward broader Jewish suspicions of the evangelical President's intentions towards Jews globally: "At a time when Jewish people are upset over the sale of jet fighters to Saudi Arabia and Egypt, they will see this as just another threat to the survival of Jews. We want to keep Mrs. Stapleton separate from President Carter, but people will make the connection." Dr. William Weller, director of Christian-Jewish relations for the National Council of Churches, echoed Tanenbaum in denouncing B'nai Yeshua. While proselytization was a central part of the Christian faith, it could not be done using "deceptive" tactics.

While Jewish leaders were glad to collaborate with Christians to combat the messianic threat, their anxieties surrounding Jewish youth and Christian conversion were heightened in the context of increased proselytization efforts by Evangelicals and others toward young Americans. Thus, while many Jews found common cause with their Christian counterparts, this collaboration must be understood in large part as an attempt to retain Jewish youths in the face of secularization but also the real possibility of Christian conversion. Though, of course, by definition evangelical Protestantism had always seen conversion as a fundamental tenant of its faith, in the 1970s evangelical groups were talking in the language of total conversion of the continent and the world, and trained their sights on children, teens, and young adults as the foot soldiers of this mission. In the early 1970s, Protestant groups like Campus Crusade for Christ seized on the changing youth culture and the popularity of communal gathering. Adopting aesthetic and musical cues from Woodstock, Campus Crusade attracted 150,000 young people to Dallas for Explo '72 (short for Jesus Sound Explosion). A music concert but also a proselytization drive, other Christian groups realized that they had to adapt their faith to appeal to young people and attempted to appeal to youth as a specific demographic. Explo '72 was the most ambitious effort yet: led by Campus Crusade's Bill Bright and famed evangelist Billy Graham, Explo's aims were full national and eventually global conversion. While the rally's organizers were promoting American culture and an American brand of evangelicalism, they saw their faith as one that necessarily crossed national borders, and in a Cold War world as a transnational force for Christian morality and democratic politics.

The following year, 140 church groups in North America began planning Key '73, intended to be the largest evangelization drive ever. Though ultimately the rally disappointed its organizers, some of the little publicity it received came from Jewish groups who were suspicious of the rally's ultimate goals. Tanenbaum and the AJC expressed concerns for the rally's efforts and its implications—namely, that the goal of conversion could not only threaten the essentially pluralistic character of American religion but could tend toward antisemitism. One report summarized Tanenbaum's worries thusly: "will a campaign that views Christianity as a 'substitute covenant' for that of Judaism feed negative and anti-Semitic attitudes among the people it reaches; will the emphasis on door-to-door canvases and college and high school campus crusades lead to coercive pressures against Jewish individuals and others?"[185] The organizers of Key '73 publicly and emphatically insisted that they did not wish to coerce or persecute, and that there was no anti-Semitism afoot in the rally. Still, Tanenbaum was not

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[184] George Vecsey, "Carter Sister's Plan to Visit Ex-Jews in L.I. Sect Assailed," *New York Times,* May 21, 1978.
[185] No author, "Rabbi Says 'key 73' Leaders Repudiate Anti-semitism, Coercion," *Jewish Telegraph Agency*, Jan 19, 1973. JTA Digital Archives: https://www.jta.org/archive/rabbi-says-key-73-leaders-repudiate-anti-semitism-coercion.

entirely reassured. Though the rally was a failure, the episode speaks to the unease felt by many Jewish leaders at the obvious push for the conversion of youths by evangelical groups.

The evangelical movement in the United States continued to gain steam through the 1970s. Time magazine dubbed 1976 the "Year of the Evangelical," owing in part to born-again President Jimmy Carter's election to the presidency. That year, Carter garnered 75% of the evangelical vote. As the evangelicals grew in visibility, Jewish leaders continued to be vigilant in their defenses against missionizing. Some commentators like Maurice Davis focused on the failures of contemporary reform Judaism to speak to young people; others actively acknowledged the successes of Protestant groups. The JCRC's 1977 report on Jewish youths and cults noted that "'evangelical' cults" were especially effective in their proselytization because they offered a "high intensity communal faith" that allowed kids to both break with the religious institutions and worlds of their upbringing and also to avoid "social stigma" as a result of these groups' apparent adherence to the "socially acceptable language and symbols of fundamentalist Christianity."[186] Furthermore, in their view, evangelical Christianity lent itself especially well to cooptation by cult leaders because of an affinity for charismatic personalities over a sense of "personal piety or collective endeavor." It was only a short mental leap, then, for an aspiring cult leader to claim their own personal access to and knowledge of divine will. It was thus in the guise of benign and mainstream Christianity that autocratic charismatic leaders could fly under the radar, all the while recruiting Jews through the language of communal salvation and youth culture.

Of the so-called evangelical cults, messianic Christian groups like Jews for Jesus posed the biggest problem. Explicit Christian missionizing was a known entity—after all, there had been a long tradition of Protestants in particular trying to convert Jews. Relations with Christians could be fraught, especially when the issue of proselytization arose. For Tanenbaum, Rudin, and some other Jewish leaders engaged in interfaith work, Christian/Jewish relations were critical and thus conversion efforts were particularly disturbing. Their issue with the messianics fell within familiar anticult parameters—it was the groups' deceptive tactics that made them especially dangerous. While a group like Jews for Jesus was little more than "fundamentalist Christianity 'in disguise'," it was the element of disguise that had the potential to confuse young Jews, already so at-risk for social alienation and waywardness merely as a function of their status as affluent young Americans.[187]

Davis, Rudin, and Tanenbaum saw the success of the messianic groups not as an endorsement of their theology or a testament to their organization skills or talent for deception, but as a symptom of the failures of modern Judaism to speak to young people. Rudin called the attraction of young Jews to cults a "stunning indictment of our inability to relate to our youngsters on a spiritual level."[188] Like various chapters of the Jewish Community Relations Council and other community organizations and anticult activists, Rudin saw education as the first and most important line of defense against the cult incursion. Confusion about their place in the world and how to find themselves through Judaism, not a desire to know Christ, was what made young Jews particularly vulnerable to conversion. By presenting themselves as Jews, messianics did not forthrightly present Jews with a clear choice between Judaism and Christianity, as missionaries of the past had done. Rather, they offered a distorted form of both

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[186] JCRC report, 6.
[187] George Cornell, "'Jews for Jesus': A Kosher Campaign?", *Los Angeles Times*, August 13, 1977.
[188] Kenneth A. Briggs, "'Hebrew Christians' Disturb Jews," *New York Times,* May 14, 1977.

religions that pleased adherents of neither, and preyed on the social and theological naiveté of young people trying to form an identity in a confused and confusing world.

For their part, some leaders of Christian/Christian adjacent movements claimed their Jewishness in tandem with their new faiths. Mose Durst, a UC member who had been central in the growth of the Bay Area branch of the movement, became the group's president in 1980. He denied claims of the group's antisemitism and indeed proclaimed his continued connection to Jewish identity. He might have been a member of the UC, but "I just had bagels and lox for lunch" he quipped in one 1980 interview with a Jewish newspaper. "I speak Yiddish, I read the Torah in English. I love Judaism and am interested in fulfilling and dedicating the Jewish Ideal."[189] Jews for Jesus Founder Moishe Rosen likewise claimed that his movement could strengthen a sense of Jewish identity, telling the New York *Times* "when a Jew embraces Christ, he asserts rather than abandons his Jewishness."[190] Many converts had been raised in secular or only nominally religious environments; people like Durst and Rosen offered themselves as role models of how seekers could maintain the Jewish cultural identity they had been raised with while finding a renewed sense of spiritual vitality and meaning.

The AJC worked hard to combat attempts to convert Jews by a variety of Christian groups ranging from more "fringe" elements like the Unification Church to more mainline sects. In 1977, the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod unveiled an ambitious plan to convert Jews in huge numbers. This flew in the face of norms of Jewish-Christian relations, and Rudin and the AJC quickly denounced the actions of the Lutherans. Especially disturbing was the Synod's dissemination of a conversion training manual, largely based on the tactics of Jews for Jesus's Moishe Rosen, who was advising the church on how to proselytize to the Jews much to the "dismay" of the AJC.[191] These efforts at their core were anti-Semitic, because if successful they would eliminate the Jewish people.

Balfour Brickner, a famed Reform rabbi, understood the cult crisis and the future of interfaith work differently. Brickner was born in 1926, and was known as a champion of liberal causes such as the southern civil rights struggle, the anti-Vietnam war movement, and the fight for reproductive freedom for women. Like Rudin, Tanenbaum, and Davis, Brickner fought stridently for civil rights for African-Americans. He was arrested in 1964 in St. Augustine, Florida, at a segregated public pool, as Martin Luther King Jr. looked on. Though Brickner is now remembered for his work on liberal social issues and the political situation in Israel, he was also committed to interfaith cooperation and to tackling the question of cults and youth.

In a 1980 speech given before the Jewish Chautaqua Society—a group that undertook Jewish interfaith education work—Brickner laid out his vision for interfaith alliances for the 1980s, and his qualms with the state of affairs between Jews and Christians. Then leading an increasingly weak commission on Interreligious Affairs within the Union of American Hebrew Congregations (a major Reform organization), Brickner found interfaith work disturbingly low on the priority list of religious organizations. This was in part due to tense relations between Christians and Jews, not least of all because of Jewish suspicions of Christian missionary efforts

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[189] Andy Edelstein, "New Moon Head Claims He's Still a bagel-lox Jew," *The Jewish Week-American Examiner*, week of May 25, 1980.

[190] Ari L. Goldman, "Jews for Jesus Sue to Bar Letter Disseminated by L.I. Church Council," *The New York Times*, July 2, 1977.

[191] No author, American Jewish Committee Press Release in response to the missionary campaign of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod, April 7, 1978, box 3, Conversion to Christianity nearprint. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

directed at young Jews. For Brickner, anxieties around Jewish conversion to Christianity were overblown but based on very real tensions between Christians and Jews, specifically what he called "anti-goy" sentiment. He believed that mutual mistrust undermined efforts Jews and Christians to work together, which was especially crucial in the face of a rising reactionary religious conservative movement. Thus, the issue of conversion and what he termed "Jews-for-Jesus" syndrome was crucial to effective interfaith organizing and the future of liberal religion in the United States as a whole. The problem with groups like Jews for Jesus was not their effectiveness in witnessing to young Jews, as rabbis like Davis and Rudin might have believed, but the response of Christians to such efforts. Brickner refers to the "troubling schizophrenia within the heart of American Protestantism."[192] Absent from Brickner's analysis is the tone of moral panic—Jews were not under attack by cults, losing youngsters by the day. The issue rather was threefold: distrust of Christians, the "middle east imbroglio," and what he termed "the new wave of religious reaction." In terms of the latter, Brickner saw the rise of what we now call the religious right, and saw it antithetical to the separation of church and state and of individual rights that American Jews had long held dear. Not only was a fusion of church and state dangerous for Jews—it was ultimately ineffective in providing moral or spiritual guidance to youngsters. Morals had to be inculcated at home and in synagogue, and the public sphere should not be used as "the dumping ground for our failure."

Balfour Brickner might have been understandably disturbed at the power of the increasingly visible religious right. Although Jewish activists like Jim Rudin did not agree with the strict moralism and conservative politics of Moral Majority-style Evangelicalism, nonetheless Jews in the 1980s dovetailed with evangelical Christian counterparts in their continued war on NRMs in particular through the language of family unity and child safety. They also shared a tone of moral panic that was, by most metrics, overblown in terms of real numbers. Numbers of cult/NRM membership have always been notoriously hard to measure with accuracy, not least because both sides (the NRMs and their anticult adversaries) have each had an interest in inflating their numbers to legitimate their respective causes. One 1977 article from a student-run UCLA newspaper took a clear stand that Jews for Jesus and comparable groups were basically harmless. It cited a study by the B'nai B'rith Hillel foundation, which undertook a survey on missionizing activity on college campuses. The study found that although fifty of the eighty schools surveyed had a Jews for Jesus presence on campus, only fifteen reported any actual conversions—the majority of those had five or less converts.[193] Nonetheless, the specter of cults and NRMs continued to loom large within Jewish life and beyond. But after 1978, a new group called Peoples Temple would supplant the Unification Church as the most infamous NRM in the nation.

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[192] Balfour Brickner, "In the New Decade: Directions for Interreligious Relations," January 8, 1980, box 21, folder 15. MS-776. Balfour Brickner Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

[193] Anthony Levine "'Jews for Jesus'—no threat to students." HA-AM UCLA, March 1, 1977, box 3, Conversion to Christianity nearprint. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.

Chapter 3:
"We Were Going to Transform the World": Peoples Temple and California Politics

At the Hyatt Regency San Francisco one September evening in 1976, Jim Jones was the man of the hour. Peoples Temple was holding a testimonial dinner, in which politicians, Bay Area radical elites, and religious leaders came together to celebrate the exceptional humanitarianism and exemplary activism of Jones and his Temple. State assemblyman and future mayor of San Francisco Willie Brown acted as MC, but he was far from the only powerful California Democrat in attendance. Also present was San Francisco mayor George Moscone, who appreciated the mobilization of Jones and his people after his narrow election the year before against the conservative John Barbagelata.[194] So was Mervyn Dymally, the Trinidadian-born Lieutenant Governor of the Golden State, who had held the first state-level hearing on the problem of cults, and their potential impact on California's youth, in 1974. Dymally thanked Jones for setting an "example both in the US and in my former home territory, the Caribbean."[195] Others, including powerful senator Phil Burton, expressed their best wishes and apologies for their inability to attend. Burton wrote, "You are fortunate to have as your minister, a man of deep faith and commitment. I join with you in honoring him and recognizing his continued effort to serve his congregation and in the broader sense, his fellow man."[196] In addition to these Democratic bigwigs, Black radicals like Angela Davis and Eldridge Cleaver came to pay their respects to Jones. Cecil Williams, the famed progressive Black pastor and architect of Glide Memorial Church's liberal turn in the 1960s, was just one religious leader who likewise came to show support for Jones and his church's firm commitment to social welfare, antiracist causes, and egalitarian liberalism.

The period between the resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974 and the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980 saw tremendous flux with the end of the Vietnam War, a changing Democratic Party, the Carter Presidency, and the mobilization of an increasingly effective religious right. This moment of change allowed Jim Jones and Peoples Temple to ascend in local, state, and to some degree, national politics. Jones embodied a uniquely 1970s, uniquely California alchemy that endeared him to a wide, diverse, and sometimes surprising cohort of supporters. At the testimonial dinner Willie Brown reportedly introduced Jones with what may appear to be some confusing comparisons: Jones, he said, represented "a combination of Martin Luther King, Angela Davis, Albert Einstein, and Chairman Mao."[197] Apocryphal or not, this claim gestures toward the many faces of the 1970s American liberal/left that Jones came to represent for his allies and followers. For some, like President Jimmy Carter, he embodied the faith-driven commitment to racial and social justice so magnificently lived out by Dr. King. Jones corresponded with First Lady Rosalynn Carter, who like her husband respected Jones as a devout Christian and emphatic antiracist.[198] Angela Davis and other radical Black activists saw an ally, a militant and uncompromising advocate of racial equality and decolonization who railed against the excesses of the state and American capitalism. Moscone, Burton, and other Democratic

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[194] For a journalistic account of this relationship, see David Talbot, *Season of the Witch* (New York: Free Press, 2012), chapters 24-31.
[195] Tim Reiterman and John Jacobs, *Raven: The Untold Story of the Rev. Jim Jones and His People* (East Rutherford: Penguin Publishing Group, 2008), 306.
[196] Letter from Phil Burton to Peoples Temple, September 24 1976; Peoples Temple Records, MS 3800; box 1, folder 25; California Historical Society.
[197] Reiterman, *Raven*, 308.
[198] Correspondence from Jim Jones to Rosalynn Carter, October 1976; PTR, MS3800; box 2, folder 36; CHS.

leaders saw him as a respectable preacher, whose commitment to ideals of justice were bolstered by his large following which, as an interracial, intergenerational cohort provided the appealing optics of liberal coalition-building. Celebrated icon of the gay rights movement Harvey Milk was a relentless ally of Jones, writing on his behalf to President Carter even in the face of rising suspicion of Jones's conduct toward temple members.[199]

The story of Jim Jones, the NRM he led, and the liberal/left in the Bay Area exemplifies how the fringe explains the center by demonstrating the impact this movement had on local politics and public discourse. It also provides a case study in how one group moved, quite suddenly, from respectable church movement into cult status. To be clear, this story is not meant as a political screed which exposes Jones's political allies. Some politically conservative journalistic accounts weaponize this story in order to expose the left more broadly, as if progressives' relationship to Jones proves complicity in what happened at Jonestown, or implies something bigger about the cultishness of the Democratic Party or the depravity of progressive cities like San Francisco.[200] This line of thinking treats Jones and his Temple, in their aspirational politics as well as his excesses, as emblematic of the left broadly. I make no such claims: I see Jones as neither emblem nor aberration. What is far more important is understanding how Peoples Temple existed as a legitimate—and in fact valuable and viable—member of a larger religious left coalition in San Francisco and beyond, and also how, when, and by what means they became the ur-cult in American history.

As a complex religious and political movement, Peoples Temple represented a future coveted by the Democratic party: inclusive of both its post-Vietnam, left-leaning elements as well as its longer historical relationship to the Black church and civil rights. In the 1970s, the Democrats were in the process of rethinking and reforming: emergent New Democrats like Jerry Brown proposed to discard the labor-heavy blue collar base of the post New Deal era in favor of high tech and smaller government.[201] LGBT activists, women, and racial/ethnic minorities argued louder and more successfully for their place in the party and in society, demanding rights, recognition, and a seat at the table. As the party regrouped after the unsuccessful antiwar campaign of George McGovern, its leaders realized it had to both try and satisfy its most reliable voters—African Americans, labor, social progressives—and keep up with seismic shifts such as the increasing mobilization of conservative Christians for the Republican party. Peoples Temple

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[199] Letter from Harvey Milk to Jimmy Carter, February 19 1976, from the online archive of the Jonestown Institute at San Diego State University: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=19042.

[200] In 2018, Daniel Flynn (senior editor at the conservative *American Spectator*) published *Cult City: Jim Jones, Harvey Milk, and 10 Days That Shook San Francisco*, 1st edition (Wilmington, DE: Intercollegiate Studies Institute, 2018). *Cult City* is written as an exposé which explores the dark side of California and the Bay Area, and the seedy side of leftist alliances as exemplified by the relationship between Jones and Milk. Ultimately the book is a critique of San Francisco as a liberal city and the permissive, radical culture that allowed Jones to run amok.

[201] Historians have recently begun to explore more thoroughly the ways in which neoliberal trends since the 1970s—smaller government, deregulated economies, the globalization of markets and industry—were the result of *bipartisan* shifts and policies, rather than merely the purview of conservative Republicans. Lily Geismer's *Left Behind* explores forty years of increasingly pro-market and neoliberal agendas within the Democratic party. Reuell Schiller has explored similar themes in his essay "Regulation and the Collapse of the New Deal Order, or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Market," which examines these trends vis-à-vis the New Deal order that had dominated the Democratic Party as well as American politics since the 1930s. In his 2006 book *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (University of Chicago Press: 2006), Fred Turner likewise shares a Bay Area-specific story about the history of tech as it went from a Cold War-era tool of the military-industrial complex to a tool of decentralized, libertarian utopianism. It is partly from this time and place that New Democrats like Jerry Brown emerged, hoping to harness technology for progress rather than the old tools of bureaucracy which had defined Democratic politics for nearly 50 years.

brought together all of these strands, as its politically savvy leader recognized. The group thus became important both optically and practically for liberal and left-leaning politicians in the Bay Area, who saw in them a possible vision of the future Democratic Party as well as shared ideals.

The role of religion in the Democratic party was itself changing in the second half of the 1970s. In 1976, voters elected Democrat Jimmy Carter. Carter was a southern evangelical and a civil-rights liberal. Devoutly religious, Carter nonetheless insisted on a firm separation of church and state, even if his own leadership was guided by a deep sense of Christian morality. The so-called "God Gap," the idea that religious voters tend to be loyal to the GOP, is familiar to us now. In 1976, however, a reliably right-voting bloc of evangelical voters had not yet become so entrenched in our politics. Carter won 75% of those voters for Democrats in 1976. The realignment was swift, however: Ronald Reagan, Carter's Republican challenger, won the same proportion of evangelical votes in 1980, delivering his White House victory and solidifying a newly powerful factor in American politics: the Christian right. Peoples Temple arrived at a time of complex and hard-fought struggle for which party would claim the mantle of politically active Christianity, and it represents an untaken path for the Democratic party which chose to make more private the matter of religion rather than centering faith in its platform.

While Jones was entrenched in a progressive milieu, his strongest political adversary was not a Republican like Bob Dole. Rather, it was Leo Ryan, a Democratic House member from South San Francisco whose own politics aligned with the liberal state/institutional skepticism of Governor Brown and other New Democrats. Ryan championed a variety of liberal—rather than left—causes. Ryan was enlisted by a grass-roots organization of ex-Peoples Temple members and those who had family at Jonestown called the Concerned Relatives (CR). The CR argued that Jones was, essentially, a cult leader, and that their loved ones faced inhumane conditions and a lack of freedom in the Temple. Jones had made enough strong contacts, and remained a valuable enough ally, that his friends and comrades in politics were willing to go to bat for him. Further, they had legitimate suspicions of an anti-leftist smear campaign. Thus, a defense of Jones became an act of solidarity. Jones and PT thus did not avoid all charges of culthood before the deaths at Jonestown, but they did not symbolize the cult scare before November of 1978.

Peoples Temple's political involvement and embrace by Democrats and leftists unfolded alongside Bob Dole's dogged pursuit of the Unification Church and the broader media campaign that set public opinion largely against the UC. As Jones shook hands with the First Lady and marched alongside political luminaries in San Francisco, Reverend Moon and his group were under investigation for corruption and collusion with foreign governments. The press, public, and politicians did not view all small, politically active movements in the same light. In this period before Jonestown, the cult wars certainly had political stakes, as pursuing the cult issue granted politicians like Bob Dole cache as defenders of family values and the nation. But they were not yet partisan, and indeed the strongest criticism of the both the Unification Church and Peoples Temple came from within their own parties. In the 1970s, politicians did not single out groups because of their political alignment—Bob Dole would have supported the anticommunism and sexual conservatism of the UC, while Ryan would have agreed with the anti-racism at the heart of Peoples Temple ideology. Instead, what counted was the pressure exerted by constituents and the burgeoning sense, amplified by the ACM, that the cult problem was a social problem that transcended political boundaries.

Jones's anti-racist ideology, heterodox theology, and charismatic style drew members to join the Temple since its earliest incarnation in Indiana. The group became more activist in causes including anti-discrimination, global liberation, and housing in the Bay Area and beyond

when they arrived in the 1960s. By the mid-1970s, they had become more deeply entrenched in politics and busy settling land in Guyana. The tide turned decisively against Jones in 1977, as the Concerned Relatives took on the Temple through a proxy conflict surrounding the custody of a young child whose parents had defected from the Temple. This conflict mobilized both supporters and detractors of Temple activities, and engendered not only a personal legal but also more broadly political conflict. Local constituents lobbied Leo Ryan to investigate. Ryan had already been known for high-profile stunts meant to publicize issues important to the congressmen. In November of 1978, Ryan landed in Guyana, and the tragedy that followed would end nearly one thousand lives and change American culture forever.

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James Warren Jones was born in Crete, Indiana in 1931. A deeply religious child, he became entrenched in the Pentecostal revivals popular in the 1940s. In 1949, Jones married his wife Marceline. He also began to associate with the Communist Party around this time. He moved between Methodist and Pentecostal congregations in the early 1950s before founding the Temple in 1955 as a racially integrated Christian sect. In 1964, Jones was officially ordained as a minister in the Disciples of Christ. In 1966, Jones, his family, and the Temple moved from Indiana to Ukiah, California. He hoped to begin a utopian project not totally unlike the Booneville project (also located in Mendocino County) undertaken by the Unification Church in this same period. Jones's commitment to Christian ethics was uneven, even in this earlier period. He was known to contradict himself often and sometimes made a show of blaspheming, as when he threw a bible like a football onto the ground. Still, his charismatic style of preaching and constant references to radical racial equality endeared him to a small but growing following.

Jones chose to move his flock to California for several reasons. Their migration deeply impacted the movement in significant ways. The initial impetus was to escape the potential horrors of nuclear holocaust—which Jones felt so strongly that he moved his family to Brazil for several years in the 1960s in order to protect them. He also felt that the racial prejudice and violence that faced the group in Indiana was too great and that they had a better chance of achieving their dreams of racial equality in progressive Northern California. Indeed, Jones and his group found much more than a safe haven from nuclear fallout: they encountered a progressive and radical milieu that further influenced the social-justice elements of his teachings and made them even more central to the group's theology. It was also in this period in the late 1960s and early 1970s, that Jones morphed from pastor to prophet, to paraphrase Temple scholar Rebecca Moore.[202] The group also grew in numbers in California: Eighty-six members followed Jones to California, and the congregation grew by hundreds and then thousands in the following decade.[203]

The most significant structuring ideology for Jim Jones was a radical Black anti-imperialism. He wove his politics with a religious visions, with himself at the center, into a powerful—if not always cohesive—creed that structured both the Temple he led and the utopian vision he hoped to effect. For Jones, the entire world was dictated by racism, specifically anti-Blackness and white supremacy. But, like many radical groups including the Black Panthers, it would never be enough to combat anti-Black racism in the United States alone through measured

[202] Rebecca Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2009), 24.
[203] For more on membership estimates, see "How Many People Belonged to Peoples Temple?", from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=35340.

incrementalism. For Jones economic and political justice were inextricably linked to racial equality and vice versa; thus he fluidly moved between the worlds of radical socialist and integrationist preacher.

Beginning in his home state of Indiana, Jones was appalled at the discrimination he saw running rampant during the 1950s, and as a young and enthusiastic preacher spent many days traipsing through Crete, IN's Black neighborhoods in order to encourage interracial worship. He and his wife, Marceline (or Marcy), were the first white couple to adopt a Black child in Indiana, and in 1960 Jim, Jr. became the third member of what would come to be known as the Jones's rainbow family, as they also adopted three Korean children who were left orphaned by war.[204] Even if the oppression of African-Americans in the United States shaped Jones's worldview, he thought in global terms from the beginning, and took personal actions in response to American military presence abroad.

Throughout the Temple's time in California, Jones actively recruited church goers from historically Black churches, a practice known by some as "poaching."[205] Hoping, no doubt, to increase the scope and influence of his congregation and himself, he nonetheless thought it important to ensure that issues of race remained central in his sermons and in the daily lives of his parishioners. According to Rebecca Moore, some 70% of Temple members living in Jonestown were Black, and almost fully half were Black women. In California, African Americans comprised fully 80-90% of the Temple, although there were a good number of progressive whites, many of whom held high-up positions.[206]

Jones attracted the affection and loyalty of so many through his blend of impassioned egalitarian rhetoric and authoritative paternalism, as well as a penchant for performance. In Indiana, Jones first began to perform healings of the sick. These were highly dramatic affairs, which would often leave many congregants in tears. He framed himself as a martyr, a Christ-like figure who endured poverty and ridicule for his unflappable convictions. He would sometimes hang a sign on his pulpit which indicated that he wore a choir robe when he preached not for vanity, but because his street clothes had been worn ragged, as though he refused to spend money on something as frivolous as clothing. Like Reverend Moon, David Berg, or other NRM leaders, he formed a surrogate family in the Temple, with himself as father. Temple members would often refer to him as "dad," and from the early 1960s encouraged members to spend holidays with him and their Temple family rather than their biological ones.[207] By all accounts, he was fiercely charismatic and attuned to people, possessing an intensity that made people feel cared for, heard, and intimidated all at once.

Members often testified to Jones's power and importance in their lives at Temple services. Even through transcripts, the emotional force of the statements is palpable. One woman spoke thus of Jones in a 1973 service in San Francisco:

> The caring that you don't even see. I think some of you haven't even been to the valley to even get a glimpse of his caring. But the character he has and

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[204] John R. Hall, *Gone from the Promised Land: Jonestown in American Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1987), 67.

[205] For more on this, including a fascinating episode involving Jones's supposed attempted takeover of the congregation of the charismatic leader Father Divine in Philadelphia in the late 1960s, see Reiterman, *Raven,* 55-56.

[206] Rebecca Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple,* 30. Moore and others have also discussed the discrepancy between the racial makeup of most congregants as opposed to those on the elite "planning commission," the small circle who surrounded Jones most closely and made many key decisions for the group.

[207] Reiterman, *Raven*, 55.

> the love that he has, if you could see the love that he has
> for animals and plants and even weeds, you would see what he has for you.
> (Excited) You can imagine the love he has for you. (Calms) And he
> works constantly, and all you have to do is follow his teachings. Be good, and he
> will mentally take care of everything. Just speak on what you need taken care of.
> and it's taken care of. There is nowhere, no one like our Pastor Jim Jones.[208]

Jones cultivated and savored his image as a loving, incomparable, extraordinary father figure. He, of course, had control over who spoke and probably to some degree their actual testimony. At the same time, it's clear that he genuinely served a tremendously important purpose for his flock and gave many a sense of family, community, and purpose they had lacked.[209]

Individuals and families joined Jones for many reasons: some political, some religious, some for community. For most, it was some combination. One former member, Jesselle Carter, remembers how central the church was to her growing up. In addition to the Bay Area, the Temple had an active contingent in African-American neighborhoods in LA. Carter, who grew up in Compton and in Watts, remembers: "I went to Peoples Temple in Los Angeles with my grandmother until I was 12 years old. It was a friendly church. Well, it was the only church that I knew. We were like a big gigantic family. No matter the color of skin, everyone got along well. All colors were united together, and it was really wonderful to me."[210] Carter has fond early memories of the Temple, but most of her recollection is of the pain of losing loved ones, including her grandmother, in 1978. Others joined as adults seeking, as Temple member Dominique Z. Delphine put it, participation in the "noble cause." Delphine recalls the rush of joining the Temple: "Heady stuff. No time to ponder petty considerations. We were going to transform the world!! I had no idea of what Peoples Temple life would look like, but I had tons of enthusiasm and inspiration."[211] Members of the Temple had grand aspirations for the change they wanted to effect, and the model of equality and brotherhood they hoped to promote.

Some of the church's older members were poached from other religious movements, while others were drawn to the Temple's activism rather than its spiritual offerings. A lifelong revolutionary, Henry Mercer joined PT in 1973 at the age of 88. He had grown up poor in Jessup, Georgia, and was politically active all his life after joining the Marcus Garvey movement in his teens where he "quite naturally started to learn a lot about the revolutionary struggle."[212] Mercer went on to advocate for workers' rights and protest what he saw as the poor conditions

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[208] Unknown speaker, untitled sermon, San Francisco, 1973. Tape Q1023 from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=27309

[209] Exploring voices from Temple members presents a variety of challenges and opportunities to for scholars. Peoples Temple's tragic end has colored the memories of many who had personal connections to the group. Sadly, many of those who believed most strongly in the movement's mission did not survive to tell their own stories. Much, though not all, of the material we have is from the perspective of Temple defectors or family members of those who died at Jonestown. Every former member knew and loved someone who died in Guyana. While these perspectives are immensely valuable, many of these recollections have been recorded in hindsight.

[210] Remembrance of Jesselle Carter, from the Jonestown institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=80741.

[211] Personal Reflection of Dominique Z. Delphine, from the Jonestown institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=81296.

[212] Henry Mercer's recollection in Denice Stephenson, ed., *Dear People: Remembering Jonestown: Selections from The Peoples Temple Collection at the California Historical Society* (San Francisco : Berkeley: California Historical Society Press; Heyday Books, 2005), 42.

he faced while working for President Franklin Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration. He considered himself a socialist and refused to sign anticommunist refusal pledges in the 1940s and 1950s as he was "Chairman of the Propaganda committee." Because of the McCarthy-era witch hunts against members of the Communist Party, "I had a tough time."[213] He continued fighting on the frontlines of activist causes and was blinded by tear gas in Philadelphia in 1968. When he heard Jim Jones on the radio, he was taken by his message of social change. Jones's vocation as a preacher did little to attract Mercer, who recalled his first time speaking at the temple: "When I got to the Temple, I got up to speak. I said I'd never liked preachers all my life, that I'd been a revolutionary for forty years and I never did like preachers, because they didn't want to do nothing but eat chicken and buy Cadillacs." Jones replied that Mercer could not "know how you thrilled my heart" with his talk about preachers.[214] Having fought for socialist change his whole life, in his final years Jones and his people offered a vision of community and struggle that spoke to Henry Mercer. Mercer died alongside other Temple members in November of 1978.

The churchly aspect of PT might not have appealed to Henry Mercer, but it drew many other in. Jones's theology combined traditional aspects of charismatic Pentecostal Christianity with a message of justice and equality that caught on quickly in the civil rights and Black Power eras.[215] By all accounts, he was magnetic in the pulpit. The theatrical faith healings he performed promoted both the healing power of devotion as well as his own spiritual force. He relied on an image of Jesus and Christianity that emphasized the social gospel: Christ's life as an example of love for the meek, for the downtrodden, for the poor and the marginalized. He thus linked, like many activist protestant groups of the time, a message of social justice to one of salvation. Jones himself, however, did not have a consistent relationship with the gospel or the church. He famously threw down a Bible during sermons, and wrote a screed attacking the inconsistencies of the Book. For Jones, God was love, and love was socialism.[216] Jones claimed that he had the most love inside of himself, and therefore was the closest to God. This and other theological departures from denominational orthodoxies allowed Jones to balance his status among his supporters as a faith leader, but also to decry the inconsistencies of organized religion and even to curse God himself for allowing injustice and pain to flourish on His earth. In one sermon from

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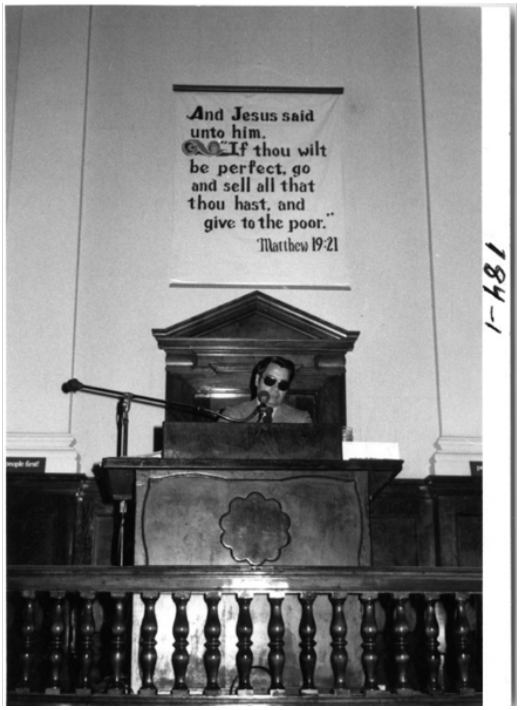
[213] Mercer, 44.

[214] Mercer, 45.

[215] Pentecostalism in the United States emerged in the twentieth century out of various conservative Protestant traditions, including both majority white and predominantly Black denominations, and has often (as in Peoples Temple), lent itself to interracial spaces of worship. The Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles, associated with the Black Holiness tradition, is usually credited as the beginning of the Pentecostal movement in the United States in 1906. Pentecostalism emphasizes a direct relationship to the Holy Spirit and a personal experience of God. Often these experiences manifested physically: many believers speak in tongues—letting the Holy Spirit speak through their bodies in an unlearned and unrecognizable language—and faith healing emerged as a popular practice in many Pentecostal communities. For more on Pentecostalism in the United States, see David D. Daniels, "North American Pentecostalism," in *The Cambridge Companion to Pentecostalism*, ed. Amos Yong and Jr Robeck Cecil M., Cambridge Companions to Religion (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 73–92.

[216] See also Emerson Maureen Stuckart, "'Never Heard a Man Speak Like This Before': Reverend Jim Jones and Peoples Temple." (Master's Thesis, Ruprecht-Karls-Universität-Heidelberg, 2014). For more detailed analysis of Jones's theology, see David Chidester, *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown*, (Indiana University Press, 2003). John Hall has also identified what he refers to as Jones's "apostolic socialism," in which socialism was an intrinsic part of Jones's interpretation of Christ.

1972, he seethed: "that Bible holds on like a disease." Death and destruction is all around, because "that's your damn system. That's your damn God you had."[217]



Jones at the pulpit, ND. courtesy of SDSU Special Collections.

Jones exalted Blackness, often calling himself Black to cede his own whiteness which he associated with violence and evil. Sometimes he referred to himself as such without comment, decrying the treatment of "we Blacks" in the United States, in an apparent effort to equate all those oppressed with Blackness.[218] In one 1972 sermon he elaborated on this usage. He asked the congregation: "Anyone white in here?" When no one answered in the affirmative, Jones responded:

> Course not. Because you've identified with the problem. If you're working for liberation then you're Black, honey and—listen, I never saw anybody white except when they're dead…We're all mixed up but anybody loves freedom is Black, right?[219]

Not only was Jones convinced that he himself so strongly identified with the Black struggle that he has ceded his whiteness, but he also firmly equated Black with good, white with bad. He would later follow up on this notion by naming Jonestown's suicide drills "White

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[217] Jim Jones, untitled sermon, San Francisco, 1972. Tape Q1059-2, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=27332. NB: The identifying letter/number combination corresponds to how the tapes were catalogued by the FBI once recovered from Jonestown.
[218] Jim Jones, untitled sermon, Los Angeles, 1973. Tape Q953, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=63066.
[219] Jim Jones, untitled sermon, San Francisco, 1972. Tape Q1028A, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=27314.

Nights" in order to counter the negative association of night as Black, and even corrected oft-used terms like blackmail and black market to "whitemail" and "whitemarket."

Jones saw all oppression as intertwined, and predominately stemming from racism and capitalism as twin forces of injustice, misery, and violence. One need only read through or listen to his sermons, both from his time in California and in Guyana to see that for Jones, the world was a bipolar one, in which white supremacy, largely driven by capitalism, displaced and violated people of color. Although Jones was far from totally consistent in his views, his confusing and impassioned free association can be just as useful in constructing a constellation of his ideas about the world. In one 1978 sermon in Jonestown, for instance, he moved fluidly from the double consciousness of WEB Du Bois[220] to the Supreme Court's Bakke decision on affirmative action as a sign of apocalypse to the apartheid regime in South Africa to American colonialism to the rise of hate groups in the United States.[221] For Jones, there was no isolating one example of injustice from another. It followed that he would see himself as one of the persecuted and that the Concerned Relatives and others who accused him of abuses were part of a vast network of rightwing operatives who fought for racism and American imperialism.

Jones and Temple members believed strongly in what Jones referred to as apostolic socialism. This ethos also fit with the leftist anti-statism that was emerging at the same time. Apostolic socialism was communal and utopian, based on sharing. For Jones, notions of communalism and equality structured his views of God as well as the Temple's works on earth. In one sermon he explained:

> Love is apostolic communalism where there is total equality. There are no barriers in the family of God or Christ. Christ, I prefer to say, meaning the revolutionary, the anointed one, because God has no meaning without Christ. Christ in you, the hope of glory.[222]

This idea not only defined life at the settlement at Jonestown, which was meant to embody these principles, but many of the activities of the Temple in California. Members operated rehab centers, homes for children with disabilities, and fostered many children who were in the system. Thus, Peoples Temple's modus operandi worked in a political framework that experimented with community-driven, rather than government-driven, implementation of leftist and socially conscious programs.

People came into the Temple with various relationships to socialism, activism, and religion. Temple member Neva Sly Hargrave remembered being "in heaven" as she heard Jim talk about his dream community in which everyone was cared for, shared everything, and felt equal. Then during one sermon, "Jim brought the dream together with one word. We are all socialist! The church rocked with thunderous applause!" She and her husband were shocked initially, as "the way Jim talked about the community, he was talking about GOD's way, certainly not socialism! We were shocked to the core…We finally decided that we were, in fact,

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[220] "Double consciousness," a concept coined by W.E.B. DuBois in 1903, refers to the ways that oppressed people (especially African Americans) are forced see themselves in two ways: through their own eyes as well as through those of their oppressors. This concept has been hugely influential for scholars and activists, and has since been expanded on by Paul Gilroy and other important scholars of race and identity.

[221] Jim Jones, untitled sermon, unknown location, 1977. Tape Q1028, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=27314

[222] Jim Jones, untitled sermon, San Francisco, 1973. Tape Q1023 from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=27309.

socialist for dreaming this vision of communal life and brotherhood!"[223] Hargrave remembered being intoxicated by the world they hoped to create, furiously advocating politicians and trying to "sway" them on social issues. In her view, the Temple largely succeeded in these campaigns.

After their stint up north, Jones and his temple moved to San Francisco in 1972. By the mid-1970s, Jones was powerful political figure in the city. His unique approach had attracted a novel mix of committed church-goers especially from within the Bay's African American Protestant communities, as well as radical young white people.[224] This assemblage proved irresistible for local politicians like George Moscone, Harvey Milk, and others. By 1976, these politicians owed Jones sizeable favors for their efficient support during close campaigns: not only was Jones appointed as head of the San Francisco Housing Commission, but one of his top lieutenants, Tim Stoen, landed a plush appointment of his own in the district attorney's office.[225]

From the time Jones set up shop in San Francisco in 1971, the group's political preoccupations tended along three primary poles: progressive electoral politics, antiracism in the United States, and global anti-imperialism. Only in Guyana did Jones's politics become fervently and explicitly anti-capitalist and communist. At first, the Temple was largely interested in providing services to the needy, along the lines of other churches. They sponsored rehab programs to combat addiction, built retirement homes for elderly members of the Temple, and fostered children. These activities were not necessarily completely outside the purview of self-interest: these services at times provided a justification for the church's collection of a hearty chunk of Temple members' income and collapsed members' lives outside of the church with their participation in it. That said, these efforts did tend to fill voids in needy communities, where social services were more difficult to come by.

The Temple donated vast amounts of time and money to a variety of causes during their San Francisco period. Jones and his congregants participated both in electoral politics as well as in grassroots organizing. They were known as a super effective bloc, not because Jones commanded so many votes, but because Temple members were considered highly organized foot-soldiers who could show up to a rally at an hour's notice, or canvass tirelessly should Jones direct them to do so. For liberal politicians like Mayor George Moscone, whom Jones helped get elected in 1975, they also made for fine optics: an interracial, intergenerational audience, they reflected the diverse coalition progressives hoped to attract. Endorsements were not limited to local politicians, either, and the Temple received thank you letters from presidential candidates Hubert Humphrey and George McGovern, and a range of US congressmen like Phil Burton.[226]

While letters from McGovern and Humphrey, for instance, read as generic expressions of gratitude, many of Jones's political associations were more substantial. Harvey Milk, the famed gay rights advocate, was among Jones's most committed allies. Milk wrote to Jones personally at least five times over 1976 and 1977, effusively praising not only Jones's work in service to the greater community, but for his role in redeeming Milk's work. "Jim," he wrote after attending a Temple meeting in 1976, "the words are not good enough but lacking the words themselves I can only say in the fullest, deepest and warmest meaning of the often over used expression Thank

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[223] Personal Reflection of Neva Sly Hargrave, published by the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=17020

[224] For a detailed analysis of the demographics of the Peoples Temple, see: Rebecca Moore, "Demographics and the Black Religious Culture of the Peoples Temple" in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*, edited by Rebecca Moore, Anthony Pinn, and Mary Sawyer (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005).

[225] Reiterman, *Raven*, 270.

[226] These letters are peppered throughout the CHS archive, especially in PTR MS3800; box 2 folder 36.

you…It may take me many a day to come back down from the high I reach today (all sic)."[227] In another, Milk gushed, "My name is cut in stone in support of you and your people."[228] These words provide a glimpse of the admiration he inspired not only in religious converts who thought him to be some sort of messiah, but in many highly regarded politicians and activists who seemed deeply convinced that Jim Jones was a man of courage, empathy, and unshakeable ideals.

The relationship between Milk and Jones speaks not only to the latter's charisma and charm, but to larger political and social realities in San Francisco life in the 1970s. Mayor George Moscone, and Democrats like Burton and McGovern on the state and national levels, sought to create a winning coalition of liberals around issues of social justice, civil rights, and economic equity. Historian Jonathan Bell has argued, for instance, that in mobilizing through both established political channels and the at the grassroots level, California Democrats led the way in forming the postwar liberal establishment.[229] In many ways, San Francisco and the Bay Area lay at the heart of this formation. While Democratic bigwigs like Jesse Unruh and Alan Cranston hailed from the Golden State, providing an establishment counter to the GOP's realignment in the 1960s, radical groups like the Black Panthers and others made Oakland, San Francisco, and the rest of the Bay a hotbed for progressive left activism. By the 1970s, many of the radicals of the sixties were transitioning into mainstream politics, as Panther Bobby Seale and SDS's Tom Hayden both mounted formidable (though ultimately unsuccessful) leftwing challenges to establishment Democrat candidates in the mid-1970s.

In many ways, Jones ran the gamut of the left-liberal coalition of the 1970s, but it was within San Francisco politics that he insinuated himself most significantly. When Jones and the Temple moved to San Francisco in 1972, progressive politics and alternative lifestyles had made the city a vibrant site of counterculture, a destination for seekers of many sorts. The city had its share of apparent contradictions. As is clear at Jones's 1976 testimonial dinner, in San Francisco radicals and party elite mingled; in Berkeley, hippie Christian groups like the Christian World Liberation Front sought new ways to evangelize. It was within this world—so different from segregated small-town Indiana where Jones had grown up—that Jim Jones came into his own.

Jones's appointment to the San Francisco Housing Commission in 1976 symbolized larger struggles along lines of race, poverty, and discrimination in the Bay Area. As Tanya Hollis has noted, Jones did not receive the appointment in a vacuum: the Fillmore neighborhood where he and his Temple had settled upon their move to San Francisco was wracked with poverty, and had frequently been the site of redevelopment initiatives by the city.[230] Hollis argues that in order to understand Jones's influence in the city—why exactly would hundreds of African-Americans follow a white socialist preacher into the Guyanese jungle?—one must look to the active destruction of communities in San Francisco and across the Bay.[231] By 1972, the Fillmore had

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[227] Letter from Harvey Milk to Jim Jones, March 21 1976; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 14; CHS.
[228] Letter from Harvey Milk to Jim Jones, undated; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 21; CHS.
[229] See Jonathan Bell, *California Crucible: the Forging of Modern American Liberalism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 6–7.
[230] Tanya Hollis, "Peoples Temple and Housing Politics in San Francisco," in *Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America,* 91.
[231] This is part of a larger, very significant story of suburbanization and the destruction of urban communities across the US. For more on this process in the Bay Area, see Robert O. Self, *American Babylon: Race and the Struggle for Postwar Oakland*. Thomas J. Sugrue, *The Origins of the Urban Crisis: Race and Inequality in Postwar Detroit : With a New Preface by the Author* (Princeton: University Press, 2005) provides an excellent and seminal treatment of the process in Detroit.

been at the center of urban development projects, and residents had fought to keep their neighborhood from developers. The Temple was long concerned with social services for the underserved, and Jones was vocal in his disgust with racism, poverty, and the indifference of government. The Temple's activism at the neighborhood level—featuring community programs, soup kitchens, and the like—along with Jones's continual support of Moscone and others at the top of the political hierarchy made Jones himself a highly valued ally of Fillmore residents as well as Black community groups. Thus, after canvassing for Moscone in 1975 and ensuring the support of his people, Jones seemed a natural choice for the Housing Commission. Shortly after his appointment, Jones and other community leaders such as the reverend Cecil Williams of Glide Memorial Church joined the charge, led by Asian-American activists, against the redevelopment of the International Hotel.[232] The Fillmore hotel provided housing for 100 residents, mostly elderly Chinese and Filipino people. Tenants and Fillmore residents petitioned to turn the hotel into public housing, rather than a luxury high-rise or some other object of "renewal." The tenants were evicted that year, but the episode demonstrates that Jones and his people operated did not operate in a vacuum nor according to separatist utopian ideals as seemed the case in Guyana.



Jim Jones and Rev. Cecil Williams outside of the International Hotel, 1977.

Jones's ascent also coincided with the burgeoning gay rights movement in San Francisco, famously led by Harvey Milk and others. Milk came out of the closet in 1972, and got involved in San Francisco politics in 1973. After running unsuccessfully (like Tom Hayden and Bobby Seale) for office in the early 1970s, Milk was elected to the San Francisco City Council in 1977, making him the first openly gay elected official in California. In 1978, shortly before his death, Milk helped successfully defeat Proposition 6, which would have barred gays from teaching in California public schools. As Milk waged his battle for the rights of gay Americans, energetically canvassing at the grassroots level, Jones and his people were waging their own campaign for justice in the Fillmore. According to Milk's letters to Jones, he saw them as kindred spirits, warriors on the same side. Milk put his own campaign success in such terms, reassuring Jones that a victory for Milk would mean "hope to all in every minority."[233] The

[232] Hollis, "Peoples Temple and Housing Politics in San Francisco," 92-93.
[233] Letter from Harvey Milk to Jim Jones, April 27 1976; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 24; CHS.

establishment, the "old way of doing things," as Milk put it, could no longer sustain itself under the weight of modern civil rights movements. To Milk, he and Jones were at the forefront of this vision of social engagement.

Jones enjoyed the attention and power, and it is impossible to disentangle the personal gain he sought (either in the form of recognition, or autonomy for his dealings in the Temple) from the political change he hoped to effect in making these connections. For years, since the move to California, the Temple and Jones had sought to ingratiate themselves with powerful people for pragmatic reasons. Indeed, as much as the Temple sided with the Black Panthers in their claims against the oppression of a white supremacist state, many letters indicate Jones's efforts to solidify positive relationships with police departments in both San Francisco and Mendocino County, where Ukiah is located.[234] Jones maintained good relationships with multiple Republicans, making sure his people reached out to Governor Ronald Reagan (sending him flowers) and—even more bizarrely—to show their support for President Nixon, even though they adamantly opposed the Vietnam War. Furthermore, Jones was not shy in asking favors of his allies in high places once he had made a name for himself on the political scene. One incident entailed Senator Phil Burton personally confronting the US Airforce about a Temple claim that that the government was spying on a meeting at which the Mississippi civil rights activist Unita Blackwell was speaking.[235]

Jones's political power in San Francisco culminated in his appointment to the Housing Commission in 1976, after he and the Temple helped to elect Mayor George Moscone. It was a powerful position, and not the only one he was up for. Shortly before this appointment, he was named to the Human Rights Commission for the city; a little over a year later, the Concerned Relatives would publish a damning indictment detailing accusations of human rights violations by Jones.[236] One month after sending a letter of congratulations regarding Jones's appointment to the Housing Commission, John L. Burton (State Senator and Chair of the California Democratic Party from 2009 to 2017) wrote to Governor Jerry Brown to recommend Jones to the UC board of regents, the most powerful unsalaried position in the state.[237]

One of the most striking elements of Jones's remarkable story is just how much access and respect he was able to garner, not from fringe types, or even radicals moving into mainstream politics; his name was on the lips of some of the most powerful politicians in the nation. The testimonial dinner that opened this chapter was only one such event of its kind. In 1977, a celebration was held on MLK Day at the Peoples Temple flagship church on Geary St. in San Francisco. At this event, Governor Jerry Brown gave Jones a plaque celebrating his achievements in the spirit of Dr. King.

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[234] Correspondence between Jones and police; PTR, MS 3800; boxes 1 and 2; CHS.
[235] Letter from Phil Burton to Lt. Colonel Thomas S. Collins, January 10 1977; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 25; CHS.
[236] "Accusation of Human Rights Violations by Rev. James Warren Jones Against Our Children and Relatives at the Peoples Temple Jungle Encampment in Guyana, South Africa," April 11, 1978, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=13081.
[237] Letter from John L. Burton to Jerry Brown, November 22 1976; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 24, CHS.



Jones receives an award in honor of MLK, 1977.

The Temple was also a strong supporter of a number of leftist causes, be it the antiwar struggle, labor rights, or racial equality. The sheer energy of Temple members is striking, as they seemed to promote and endorse nearly every significant left issue of the time. The Temple provided financial support to the American Indians who occupied Alcatraz Island for over a year and a half from 1969-1971.[238] They received a personal thank-you letter from powerful California Democrat Jesse Unruh for their donation to Cesar Chavez's UFW.[239] The list goes on and on. Through this work, Jones shored up support from notable left activists like Angela Davis and the founder of the American Indian Movement, Dennis Banks.

But the Temple was especially energetic in its support of race-related and anti-imperialist causes, broadly conceived. In 1976, it hosted an African Liberation Day at the Temple, to which they invited nationalists and leaders of liberation movements from the nations of Tanzania, Angola, Zimbabwe, and South Africa. Temple members campaigned fiercely against South African Apartheid, and also for the rights of those who were the targets of racially motivated prosecutions, like the Wilmington 10.[240] They petitioned the government about the treatment of children in Vietnam in 1969; they lobbied for affirmative action during the Supreme Court's hearing of the 1978 Bakke case; they stood side by side with Black Panthers shouting "Free Huey." They were involved in a wide range of political causes, all of which linked them to a broader agenda of social justice (especially around racial equality) and to the progressive agendas of liberal Democrats throughout California.

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[238] Letter from Indians of All Tribes to Peoples Temple, August 29 1970; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 7; CHS.
[239] Letter from Jesse Unruh to Peoples Temple, January 3 1969; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 7; CHS.
[240] Moore, *Understanding Jonestown*, 30.



The holy host: *At a 1976 temple lunch, Reverend Jones sat between two friends, S.F. mayor Moscone (left) and Lieutenant Governor Dymally.*

Jones (center), Moscone (L), and Lt. Gov. Dymally (R), 1976.

The Temple's vision was not limited to California or the United States. They bought land in Guyana, under an agreement with the government, in 1974. Guyana remained a plantation colony of Britain until 1966 and only established itself as an independent republic in 1970. The newly sovereign state was quickly dominated by the People's National Congress, a socialist party. Jones decided to establish Jonestown (also known as the Peoples Temple Agricultural Project) in 1974, two years before he was appointed to the Housing Commission. Jones's activity with regard to Caribbean independence and decolonization movements remains surprisingly unexplored. The relationship between Jones and California Democrats urging the US to give attention to decolonization movements in the Caribbean demonstrates that Jones's activist work in California was not as distinct from his life in Guyana as it might initially seem. Indeed, in the eyes of some of Jones's allies, such as Lieutenant Governor Mervyn Dymally and Carlton Goodlett, the prominent physician and newspaper editor, Jones was an ideal liaison between the newly liberated people of Guyana and those struggling for equality in the United States.

Dymally, a native of the Caribbean, showed deep investment in the success of recently independent Caribbean nations and saw Jones as a strong and committed ally in this cause. Dymally praised Jones at his testimonial dinner, holding him up as an example for both the US and the Caribbean. Then, just after Christmas in 1976, Dymally was selected to accompany Jones to Guyana to meet with Prime Minister Forbes Burnham.[241] For the Temple, Dymally's visit bolstered Jones's claim to the Guyanese government that he was well-connected in American politics. For Dymally, it seemed an opportunity to open fresh lines of communication with a newly independent state, demonstrating the US's willingness to work with the decolonizing world. Indeed, in their meeting, Burnham expressed hope that Guyana and the US could act cooperatively. Dymally promised to pass the message on to the State Department. Jones was a conduit; a liaison between the political world and that of grassroots activism. A tried and true friend to the Black community in the US and the Black community of the world, he was a natural choice to host the new President of Grenada when Dymally invited him to visit the United States in the summer of 1977.[242]

Carlton Goodlett used his weight in the Black press to advocate for Jones's causes and bolster his image in the Black community. Goodlett was the president of the National Newspaper

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[241] Reiterman, *Raven,* 285.

[242] Letter from Mervyn Dymally to Eric Gairy, February 23 1977; PTR, MS3800; box 59, folder 1002; CHS.

Publishers Association, the influential network of Black editors, publishers, and journalists in the US. He edited the widely circulated *San Francisco Sun Reporter*. Goodlett recommended Jones to both the Prime Minister and the opposition leader in Guyana, speaking as a representative of US African Americans. Goodlett spoke in optimistic terms about opening lines of communication between the Black press and Guyana. He suggested that "the Peoples Temple Agricultural Mission might serve as an excellent liaison for the transmission of information between your country and the racial minority communities of the United States."[243]

Guyana was not the only left Caribbean state to which Jones made overtures. He several times reached out to Cuba, though he never met Fidel Castro. Attempting to contact Castro made sense given Jones's longstanding interest in socialism, anti-imperialism, and racial oppression. What is striking, however, is the means by which Jones attempted to make inroads. Jones enlisted John Burton and Willie Brown to recommend him for a visit to Fidel Castro. Jimmy Carter was attempting to warm relations with Castro's Cuba, which had been tense for nearly two decades. Still, the tone in which Burton and Brown recommended Jones to Castro was notably friendly and warm. Jones, Burton wrote to Castro in January of 1977, "has admired the objectives of the Cuban Revolution since before its inception." He ended on a noticeably comradely note: "President Castro, my felicitations to you and the rest of the Cuban people for the tremendous social gains you have achieved over the last 18 years, and for the recent institution of the democratic electoral process in your country."[244] Brown's letter (written the same month if not the same week as Burton's) was no less laudatory of either Jones or Castro. He framed Jones's desire to liaise with Castro as part of Jones's thoroughgoing commitment to the international struggle for liberation. He mentioned Jones's commitment to brotherhood; his adoption of children of "all racial and ethnic backgrounds;" and especially, his unequivocal stance on justice and equality. This he framed in specifically international terms of solidarity. Jones's deep belief in "the right of self-determination for all nations" encouraged him to speak out against "interventionist policies in the Caribbean and other parts of the world."[245]

Jones attempted to make appeals about Cuba to the highest levels of the US government, even lobbying the First Lady. During one 1976 trip to the Bay Area, the First Lady met Jones when they were seated next to each other at a dinner. They maintained a correspondence, though most of her letters were generically polite. One sticks out: in one letter from 1977, Jones urged Mrs. Carter to bring the plight of the Cuban people to her husband's attention, specifically their need for hospital equipment. According to the New York *Times*, Jones couched this plea in terms of "humanitarian aid, which you [Mrs. Carter] spoke of recently, and an opportunity to win the Cuban people away from the Soviet orbit."[246] Jimmy Carter, according to much of the literature on the history of human rights, reinvigorated the notion and put it centrally in his foreign policy globally, and specifically in the case of US-Soviet relations.[247] Equally noteworthy was Jones's willingness to position himself as a defender of American interests against the Soviet Union, though in retrospect his communist sympathies ran deeper than his commitment to US interests.

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[243] Letter from Carlton Goodlett to Cheddi Jagan, June 17 1976; PTR, MS3800; box 59, folder 1002; CHS.
[244] Letter from John L. Burton to Fidel Castro, January 1977; PTR, MS3800; box 1, folder 24; CHS.
[245] Letter from Willie Brown to Fidel Castro, January 25 1977; PTR, MS3800; Box 59, folder 1002; CHS.
[246] Robert McFadden, "Leading Americans Backed Jones Sect," *New York Times*, November 21, 1978.
[247] For more on Carter's role in the history of human rights, see: Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Daniel J. Sargent, *A Superpower Transformed: The Remaking of American Foreign Relations in the 1970s* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

By 1977, Jones had the ear of some of the most powerful Democrats in government. He appealed on many different levels: as a leader of an interracial church movement, a tireless advocate of the poor and downtrodden, a vocal opponent of racism and degradation in many forms. He seemed to have the respect of people on the ground—not just from his own followers but from some of the most esteemed voices in grassroots movements across the Bay area. He always had critics, however, and after several years of attempts, their voices would finally be heard.



Temple members Parade through Georgetown, Guyana, 1977.

Jones himself did not relocate to Guyana until 1977, when the impending publication of a damning article in *New West* magazine by Marshall Kilduff and Phil Tracy appeared an unavoidable public relations disaster. The article relied on testimony from ex-members, including some who were highly involved with the Concerned Relatives. Once in Guyana Jones dropped the pretense of religious Christian devotion and seemed to commit fully, at least in his rhetoric, to radical communism and socialism. Over a speaker system that would broadcast Jones's voice at any time of day or night, the thousand-plus residents of Jonestown would hear him expound on the evils of the United States government, on the corrosive power of racism, on international leftist movements, and on the necessity of total allegiance to Jones himself.

Jones's descent in Guyana into paranoia and drug addiction is well-documented, as is his abuse of power and the surveillance and fear felt by many Temple members.[248] Defectors, beginning largely in the mid-1970s, began to report on the difficulty of leaving the Temple, the constant pressure to serve Temple directives at all times, Jones's deliberate and persistent attempts to separate Temple members from non-believing family members, and on his sexual relationships with many men and women in the church, at the same time as he demanded monogamy or celibacy from all members. According to these sources, Jones's manipulations began a decade before the mass-suicide at Jonestown, which was itself rehearsed in the months leading up to Leo Ryan's fateful visit as part of a test of members' commitment to Jones and his project.

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[248] See, for instance, Jeff Guinn, *The Road to Jonestown: Jim Jones and Peoples Temple* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster, 2017), 218–20.

In 1977, with the mass migration of Temple members to Guyana, a group of ex-members and family of Jones's followers began to mobilize, calling themselves the Concerned Relatives (CR). They began a public relations offensive, likening Jonestown to a concentration camp and claiming that their friends and family were being held against their will. They gained a powerful ally in Tim Stoen, Jones's former right hand man. Stoen was embroiled in a heated legal battle with Jones over the custody of John Stoen, his young son who remained in Guyana with Jones after the defection of his parents.[249] Both sides understood the case to have massive implications for the Temple, its members, and its loved ones outside the movement. The court's ruling would determine the extent of Jonestown's (and thus Jones's) autonomy, the relationship of Jonestown to the governments of both Guyana and the US, and the extent to which family members had any access to or say in what happened to relatives involved in the movement.

The Temple was not immune from criticism before the advent of the Concerned Relatives. Before they relocated to San Francisco, they were already the subject of inquiry by at least one major publication. The first substantial public rebuke of Jones and his tactics came from Lester Kinsolving, in his capacity as religion editor for the *San Francisco Examiner.* Beginning in 1972, Kinsolving published four installments questioning the practices, methods, and theology of the temple. The columns combined a skepticism of Jones's Christian bona fides—Kinsolving paid special attention to Jones's faith healing practices—and a concern for the welfare of church members in light of the considerable power Jones seemed to wield in Ukiah. Kinsolving wrote eight pieces that were meant to comprise a longer exposé series, but the *Examine*r stopped publishing his column after the fourth, perhaps due to a letter-writing campaign by the Temple meant to pressure the editors into dropping the column.

One unpublished column, salaciously entitled "Sex, Socialism, and Child Torture with the Reverend Jim Jones" exemplified many of the themes common to Kinsolving's attacks on the Temple and anticipated future criticisms as well. He portrayed Jones as a sex-obsessed maniac, using his respectable position in the community to act as a school teacher, then to abuse this position by violating norms by discussing sex with students. The column also reported disturbing instances of abuse and control, in which Jones drilled children in survival situations, and in one exercise forced a young boy to eat his own vomit. If true, this abusive social manipulation seemed to presage the so-called white night drills, in which Temple members at Jonestown would prepare for an attack on the compound and would rehearse suicide en masse. These portrayals of Jones as master manipulator, charismatic father figure, and eccentric religious outlier ran throughout Kinsolving's exposés.

The final unpublished column drew notable attention to Jones's apparent flirtation with socialism. Though he did not go so far as to call Jones a socialist or communist, Kinsolving raised concerns over Jones's tendency to "invariably criticize" the United States Government, but not communist countries of like Cuba, China, or those in the Soviet Union. He then cited Jones's praise of Cuba's Fidel Castro, and rumors that the Temple distributed books entitled "an Introduction to Socialism" to be read and burned by new converts, as evidence that the Temple was engaging in socialist activity. Kinsolving claimed he was given a songbook alongside an affidavit claiming that Jones led the congregation in singing all the songs contained in the book, and quotes one especially striking example called "Simple Grains":

> We are glad for emancipation from the profit motive lie…/

[249] Stoen had signed an affidavit claiming that Jones was John's biological father, though he later revoked this claim. Jones held that this affidavit was binding, and refused to allow John to return to the US with his parents.

> We'll have to work together to survive, to overcome the systems and their lies…/
> It'll be a great day when the system's overcome…/
> We will shout Hallelujah! Living in communal beauty…There's a highway to utopia walking in a revolutionary way…

Apparently, Kinsolving found it pertinent to warn the public about the socialist beliefs of Jones and his people. At this point, the Temple was in its public face totally committed to its image as a social services and Christ-centered church, albeit a progressive one with a message of social and racial justice.

After the 8-part series on the Temple was prematurely terminated, Kinsolving continued to speak out against Jones. As an ordained Episcopalian minister, Kinsolving took exception to Jones's practice of Christianity, as well as the legitimacy bestowed on him through his ordination by the Disciples of Christ. In 1973, he took the Disciples of Christ to task, claiming that leadership was "either unable or unwilling to do anything about one of their pastors in California who has claimed to be the reincarnation of Jesus."[250] He charged that regional and national leadership of the Disciples had been notified of Jones's "highly questionable healing practices," yet remained obstinate. He painted a portrait of Jones as a "handsome, glib, charismatic, part-Cherokee Indian" whose following wielded exceptional power in the sleepy, rural community of Ukiah, in which they were able to commandeer local political offices, radio stations, and even law enforcement.[251] Kinsolving, presaging many critics, seemed especially disturbed by Tim Stoen and his high-ranking position as the assistant DA of Mendocino County.

Kinsolving's emphasis on Jones's Cherokee heritage—which seemed to imply his dark features—is striking. Indeed, throughout this piece Kinsolving noted the racial makeup of the Temple and played on stereotypes of black Christianity as superstitious, emotional, and theatrical. After describing a service he attended in which Jones performed one of his signature cancer healings, Kinsolving noted that the "amateurish, soap opera salvation" seemed to particularly affect one member of the "mostly black" congregation. "'I know that pastor Jim Jones is God Almighty himself!' screeched an elderly woman," who Kinsolving noted was among the many parishioners who joined Jones from the Black church community in San Francisco.[252] Disciples of Christ's officialdom responded to Kinsolving's charges by calling them "inaccurate, prejudicial, and misleading." Citing the denomination's thoroughgoing commitment to "the freedom of the pulpit and the rights of a local congregation to determine its own affairs," general minister and denomination president A. Dale Fiers doubled down on the Disciples' refusal to formally investigate Jones or the Temple.[253]

Circumstances began to turn decisively for Jones and the Temple beginning in 1977. John Hall, in his 1987 exploration of the Temple identified the three-prong strategy executed by the Concerned Relatives in order to bring down Jones and the Temple: legal action, media coverage, and lobbying the government.[254] Throughout 1977 and 1978, right up until the tragedy that left nearly 1000 dead in Jonestown, Jones and his Temple—as well as their allies—were engaged in

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[250] Lester Kinsolving, "Pastor 'reincarnated as Jesus' is baffling to disciples of Christ," 1973, republished in Stephen C. Rose, *Jesus and Jim Jones* (New York: Pilgrim Press, 1979), 120.
[251] Kinsolving, 121
[252] Kinsolving, 122.
[253] Letter from A. Dale Fiers to Lester Kinsolving, February 8, 1973, republished in *Jesus and Jim Jones*, 124-125.
[254] See Hall, *Gone From the Promised Land,* chapter 10.

a bitter struggle with the Concerned Relatives and the media, who sought to expose Jones's abuses before it was too late.

Temple defectors Jeannie and Al Mills founded the Concerned Relatives in 1977. It relied on tactics of the ACM but differed in the scope of its mission. It did not join the larger anticult movement, largely because PT was not at that time considered on par with groups like the UC and the Hare Krishnas in terms of their status as a nationally known "cult." They also differed from the anticult rabbis, for instance, in that their accusations had only to do with their own families, not with the integrity of "the family" as a concept worth defending broadly. They understood that appealing to the public as family members was likely to garner them attention and sympathy, they did not necessarily attempt to make a political statement. CR was composed not only of relatives, but also of former members. As such, they were able to deploy tactics honed during their years in the Temple including letter writing campaigns and other means of drawing attention to their cause and pressuring local politicians and law enforcement to get involved.

They were in the unenviable position of attempting to reach family members in a remote section of a foreign country, and attempted to use publicity to make their cause known. One flyer featured an image of an imprisoned person, and expressed plainly the plight of the CR:

> THIS NIGHTMARE IS TAKING PLACE RIGHT NOW
>
> WILL YOU HELP US FREE OUR FAMILIES?
>
> WHO ARE THE CONCERNED RELATIVES?
>
> We are individuals having only one bond in common; relatives isolated in the "Jonestown" jungle encampment in Guyana, South America, under the total control of one man, Jim Jones. We espouse no political or religious viewpoint. Our only concern is for our families. We are bewildered and frightened by what is being done to them. Their basic human rights are being violated and the fabric of our family life is being torn apart.

They had issued demands to Prime Minister Burnham and requested investigations and inspection by the US government. They wanted "concerned citizens" who might not have themselves been touched by Jones to help in three ways: first, to "pray for the safe return of our loved ones soon, even if only for one-week home visit at our expense, return fare being guaranteed, so we can know they have the free will to choose." Next, they asked the public to write to Burnham and to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance, as two individuals "with power to force Jones to respect human and legal rights."[255] And third, to donate whatever possible to defray costs. The group had grown increasingly desperate for help, and increasingly enraged by what they saw as obstinate defense of Jones by the local political machine.

While the CR had been meeting informally during 1976 and into 1977, the custody battle over John Victor Stoen, along with impending journalistic exposés, spurred them to go public in the summer of 1977. John was born in January of 1972, to Grace and Tim Stoen. Two weeks later, Tim signed over his right of paternity to Jim Jones, claiming that Jones was the rightful

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[255] Concerned Relatives Flyer, 1977, RYMUR 89-4286-II-70 – II-71. Available online via the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/ConRelflyer.pdf

father of John because Tim was incapable of siring his own children. This decision would come back to haunt the Stoens. Grace defected in summer 1976, leaving Tim and John behind, and almost immediately began pursuing legal action to regain custody of her son. When Tim returned to the US from Guyana a year later after defecting, the Stoens doubled down on their attempts to bring John back to the states. At the same time, ex-members were becoming more vocal about Jones's abuse. A slew of damning articles were in the works, accusing Jones of psychological, sexual, and physical abuse. In September, shortly after the mass migration of Jones and hundreds of his followers to Jonestown, Grace Stoen's attorney personally traveled there to retrieve John to no avail. In November, a San Francisco court granted Grace custody of her son. The California court's injunction meant that Jones faced arrest should he try and return to the US.

The Stoen custody battle ultimately involved not only the Concerned Relatives and Jones/his loyalists, but the governments of both the United States and Guyana. The case was like a hot potato, tossed between the Department of State, the US embassy in Guyana, and Congress. Each feared the consequence of forcing its hand in a civil dispute that was largely in the jurisdiction of Guyana, a foreign nation. There was concern about Guyanese-American relations, particularly the optics of the US meddling in Guyanese affairs. Considering that there had been assurances by the state department, as well as by respected politicians (such as Mervyn Dymally) that all was well at Jonestown, the government generally thought it best to steer clear. The case was bandied about between the US and Guyanese courts, neither wanting to take on the burden of the fraught and difficult matter. In spite of the government's reluctance, the Concerned Relatives pressed on.

The Concerned Relatives initiative put the State Department as well as the Temple's powerful political allies in a tough spot. Senate Minority Whip Alan Cranston, for instance, responded to a barrage of letters about the Stoen case by claiming that since the custody case was in the jurisdiction of Guyanese courts, and since it was "essentially a civil dispute between two groups of Americans," it was US policy not to take sides.[256] This letter was written in October of 1978, over a year into the case and only a month before the Jonestown tragedy. At the same time, however, many government agencies did get involved. In 1977, the Social Security Administration and the Postal Service, in response to media scrutiny of Jones's activities, tried to cut off the flow of social security checks to Jonestown, which constituted its main source of income. Only intervention by Phil Burton put a stop to this practice.[257]

All of this action in the US had massive consequences for the people living in Jonestown. Jones's mental health deteriorated as he slipped further into amphetamine addiction, and he lived in a constant state of paranoia. Convinced that the US government, as well as that of Guyana, were out to get him, Jones put Jonestown on lockdown and spoke constantly over loudspeakers throughout the compound about government conspiracies, relocation to the Soviet Union, and the terrors of American racism and capitalism. In reality, Jones and his operation were indeed under siege. FOIA requests in recent decades have revealed that the CIA was indeed monitoring Jonestown, and the Temple's adversaries did want to arrest Jones and end his utopian experiment.[258]

Jones's response to this sense of persecution was to demand absolute loyalty from his followers and to institute drastic measures for proving these loyalties, including the infamous

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[256] Letter from Alan Cranston to David E.V. Smith, October 6 1978; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1003; CHS.
[257] Moore, *Understanding Jonestown,* 67.
[258] Moore, *Understanding Jonestown,* 68.

"white night" drills.[259] These drills took different forms, including staging mass suicide drills precisely like the real one that took place in November of 1978. Over the loud speaker would come Jones's voice, booming "Alert! Alert!," and terrified residents got ready for impending doom. White nights were meant to prepare the residents of Jonestown for mass death or coordinated action in response to an external threat to Jones or the settlement. Jones had been grooming his followers for months, warning them that an act of "revolutionary suicide" might be required of them at a moment's notice.[260] Critical to Jones's command of his people in Guyana was Jonestown's isolation, and the fact that Jones controlled all information flowing in and out of the compound, even enlisting residents to spy on each other, making it impossible to coordinate any kind of escape or dissent.

The first white night occurred in September of 1977, in response to a Guyanese court's ruling that Jones was to hand over John Victor Stoen. Jeff Haas, Grace Stoen's attorney, posted the notice in Jonestown and when it was ripped down, he convinced the court to issue a warrant for Jones's arrest. Jones and his followers became convinced that the settlement was under siege, and armed Temple members surrounded Jonestown's periphery for days. This exercise came in the face of intensifying scrutiny by the media and the Concerned Relatives, and as a result the court of public opinion; many of Jones's allies saw this negative attention as an attack on the left generally, and raced to Jones's side. Angela Davis, the radical Black communist, sent a radio dispatch to Jonestown during this white night. In a message of unmoving solidarity, she confirmed Jones's suggestion of a rightwing conspiracy, dismissing the charges of abuse:

> I know you are in a very difficult situation right now and there is a conspiracy. A very profound conspiracy designed to destroy the contributions you have made to our struggle. And that is why I must tell you that we feel that we are under attack as well. When you are attacked it is because of your progressive stand…We are with you…and we know you are going to win, and, in the final analysis, we are all going to win.[261]

Davis's statement must be viewed not only as blind allegiance to Jones, but as part of a larger political narrative playing out on the left. The Black Panthers, with whom Davis was associated, like Jones advocated a radical Black anti-imperialism.[262] Like many other, she saw Jones as part of a broader coalition of radical antiracist activists. Indeed, the Panthers truly were under attack by the FBI and the police.[263] Davis herself had been wrongfully imprisoned in connection with a violent episode that occurred in a Marin County courtroom in 1971. Her sense that government conspiracy was at the heart of the campaign against Jones must be seen in light of the very real government attacks on leftist movements in fact being perpetrated in this period.

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[259] Jones took other extreme measures to ensure the loyalty of his followers, including forcing them to testify that they had been molested by family members in the US in case those family members ever tried to bring back their loved ones in the Temple.

[260] For more on the notion of revolutionary suicide, see Harris and Waterman, "To Die for the Peoples Temple: Religion and Revolution After Suicide," in *The Peoples Temple and Black Religion in America*.

[261] Statement of Angela Davis to Jim Jones Over Radio Phone-Patch, September 10 1977; from Jonestown Institute at SDSU: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=19027.

[262] For an excellent account of this and many aspects of Panther ideology, see Joshua Bloom and Waldo E. Martin, *Black Against Empire : The History and Politics of the Black Panther Party*. (Berkeley : University of California Press, 2013).

[263] For more on COINTELPRO and government offensives against the Panthers, see Bloom and Martin, *Black Against Empire*, 200-203.

In addition to radical allies like Davis, more mainstream groups that advocated for Black rights also jumped in to defend Jones, such as the NAACP and the West Coast Caribbean Association. The Temple maintained a correspondence with Joseph Hall, president of the San Francisco chapter of the NAACP, who saw the Temple as an appealing means of securing financial support and membership.[264] Jones lent his support, and in 1977 Hall repaid the favor. In a letter to Guyanese President Forbes Burnham in defense of Jones, he not only defended Jones's integrationist/antiracist credentials, but framed things in more expansive terms of antiracist leftwing solidarity. Jones, Hall made sure to note, "speaks very warmly always of the Guyanese government, and the great strides you are making in cooperative socialism."[265] Connie Williams, president of the West Coast Caribbean Association, in a similar letter to Burnham likewise remarked that: "[i]t is not only difficult but dangerous, as you might imagine, to stand for Socialist principles in a capitalist society," and that while Jones had been subject to constant harassment for his work, his commitment was such that he remained "undaunted."[266]

Other activist groups joined in the chorus, decrying the rightwing smear campaign that sought to tear down Jones and his people. One organizer from the Gay Action/Labor Committee professed that as a "socialist and trade union activist" and defender of rights of all the oppressed, he saw Jones as only the latest victim of such rightwing propaganda.[267] Harvey Milk himself, Jones's old friend, offered an impassioned if measured defense. In Peoples Temple, he wrote, he has seen "greatness not perfection. Maybe mishaps—maybe not—but certainly not perfection and equally certain greatness."[268] In fact, Milk thought the matter so outrageous as to send an urgent letter to President Carter himself in February, 1978, in defense of Jones. Dismissing the Stoen custody case as a personal vendetta against Jones, Milk emphasized the stakes. "Not only is the life of a child at stake," he wrote, "but our official relations with Guyana could stand to be jeopardized, to the potentially great embarrassment of our State Department."[269] In addition, the president of the San Francisco Branch of the National Organization for Women (NOW), a member of the Human Rights Commission, and Dennis Banks, founder of AIM (American Indian Movement) all wrote Burnham in defense of Jones. One letter from the Bay Area Ecumenical Committee of Concern for Chile put things in the most extreme of terms. Its representative denounced the "coordinated rightwing propaganda offensive" against Jones, which he linked to the resurgence of Nazi Party, KKK, anti-Semitic "New Right" groups, and racist organizing, before comparing Jones to overthrown Chilean President Salvador Allende.[270] This picture lends only a snippet of the vast swath of liberal-left support, across many different communities, that Jones was able to mobilize quickly and efficiently in the face of mounting national (and international) scrutiny.

But while these allies were quick to denounce the dangerous situation of leftists in the US, the Temple portrayed itself as a defender of American interests in the Third World, rather than as a force for radical change and solidarity. One letter to Frank Tumminia, the "officer in charge of Guyana, Trinidad and Tobago" at the US State Department is illustrative. Laurie Efrein, the letter's author and a senior Temple operative, referred to the group as "the Peoples

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[264] Letter from Joseph Hall to Jim Jones, January 16 1976; PTR, MS 3800; box 1, folder 14; CHS.
[265] Letter from Joseph Hall to Forbes Burnham, August 2 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1002; CHS.
[266] Letter from Connie Williams to Forbes Burnham, August 3 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1002; CHS.
[267] Letter from Howard Wallace to Forbes Burnham, August 5 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1003; CHS.
[268] Letter from Harvey Milk to Forbes Burnham, August 5 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1003l; CHS.
[269] Letter of Harvey Milk to Jimmy Carter, February 19 1976; from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: http://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=19042.
[270]Letter from Charles Brody to Forbes Burnham, August 3 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1002; CHS.

Temple Christian Church," though Jones had apparently abandoned the pretense of religion upon moving to Guyana, turning instead to an explicitly socialist doctrine.[271] Writing as an innocent missionary, she explained that the Temple had been working tirelessly "towards improved foreign relations with our neighbors to the South," in particular "US-Caribbean relations." Things had been going swimmingly, as the Temple introduced unprecedented medical care and infrastructure; she effusively quotes Ptolemy Reid, Deputy Prime Minister of Guyana, calling Jones "an unofficial ambassador of goodwill between Guyana and the United States."[272]

Angela Davis and the AIM's Dennis Banks both wrote to President Carter emphasizing Jones's centrality as a promoter of American interests in the Third World, and of Jones's good intentions there. Davis, in a 1978 letter, insisted that Jones had proven himself, "a great champion of the poor and oppressed." Furthermore, "he communicates with great sensitivity to Third World Peoples…I am certain his intentions are of the best, and he will be a potent influence for good in strengthening America's relationship with that area of the hemisphere."[273] Dennis Banks ended his impassioned 2-page defense of Jones by pleading with Carter to further a "humane and generous policy" toward Guyana in light of their long experience under colonial rule, and implied that Jones's work is nothing but a positive step in this direction.[274]

The CR had political allies of their own, chiefly a Democratic congressman from South San Francisco named Leo Ryan. Part of a new wave of Democrats along with Governor Jerry Brown, Ryan saw his mission as one to cut through bureaucracy and make government more transparent. He is credited with reforms in education and an amendment to increase congressional oversight of CIA activities. Ryan became the greatest hope of the CR as they begged for help from law enforcement, politicians, and the media to help extract their loved ones from the movement. Perhaps the plight of the CR resonated with Ryan's sense that the corrupt and bloated government moved too slowly to effectively deliver justice.

Ryan had shown interest in the cult issue before, and served on the Fraser subcommittee that investigated the Unification Church in 1977 and 1978. During his involvement in that investigation, Ryan entered into the Congressional Record testimony by John G. Clark, an anticult psychiatrist about the harmful effects of involvement with "religious cults."[275] As Ryan became more involved in this issue, he was approached by an acquaintance in 1977 whose son had recently left Peoples Temple and had died shortly thereafter. Ryan became outraged that this incident had not been taken more seriously, and from then on, PT was on his radar. His decision to conduct a fact-finding mission in Guyana was not without precedent—in fact, it was classic Leo Ryan. Ryan had throughout his career used splashy investigations such as the one he conducted at Jonestown to draw attention to issues he felt were not receiving enough attention. In 1965, for instance, he moved in for a week with a black family in Los Angeles, and did a stint as a substitute teacher in Watts, in order to draw attention to the underlying conditions that had sparked the riots in the first place. He also went undercover as an inmate at Folsom prison for ten days in order to gain firsthand knowledge of life in the prison system and to amplify his work in prison reform. Later in 1972, Ryan laid down between fur hunters and baby seals during a fact-finding mission in Newfoundland in order to highlight the plight of wildlife there.

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[271]See Moore, *Understanding Jonestown and Peoples Temple*, 55, for more on socialism and religion in Jonestown.
[272] Letter from Laurie Efrein to Frank Tumminia, December 21 1977; PTR, MS 3800; box 59, folder 1003; CHS.
[273] Letter from Angela Davis to Jimmy Carter, February 28 1978; PTR MS3800; box 2, folder 36; CHS.
[274] Letter from Dennis Banks to Forbes Burnham, November 3 1977; PTR MS 3800; box 59, folder 1003; CHS.
[275] "The Effects of Religious Cults on the Health and Welfare of Their Converts," *Congressional Record* 123 pt. 29 (1977) 37401-37403. (Text from: *Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection*).

While Ryan was a lifelong Democrat, he did not always strictly adhere to the party line, notably on education reform. Part of a cohort of New Democrats, Ryan both championed liberal causes and espoused a distrust of oversized government, which he saw as untrustworthy, inefficient, inconducive to actual progressive change. Ryan had been a high school English and history teacher. Once a state legislator, he took up the cause of education reform, insisting that the bar for entering the teaching profession in California was simply too high, leading to teacher shortages and catering to the interests not of California children but rather to the interests of unions and bureaucrats. In 1967, when he was still in the State Assembly, Ryan helped establish a subcommittee on credential practices, which included future Lieutenant governor Mervyn Dymally. The state assembly passed the Ryan Act in 1970 which established the Ryan credential, paving the way for significant educational reform. Once elected to national office as a US congressman, Ryan continued to take on the political establishment, including as co-sponsor of the Ryan-Hughes act. This act stipulated greater congressional oversight of the activities of the CIA, and signaled Ryan's distrust of covert government activities.

That he came to the highly public defense of the Concerned Relatives, then, makes sense in light of his broader orientation toward the state and willingness to take up causes of personal importance. In spite of so many formidable defenses on the part of PT, the CR continued its push and pressure kept mounting on Jones and the Temple. The State Department was reluctant to take action against Jones because they did not want to interfere in Guyanese affairs, and because many respected officials (including those at the US embassy) continually put forth assurances that all was well in Jonestown. Ryan had been "stonewalled" by both the Carter administration's State Department and the local political machine who had continually refused to seriously investigate allegations against Jones. In September of 1978, Leo Ryan notified the State Department of his intention to visit Jonestown, in order to see for himself what was going on as well as to bring home anyone who was being held against their will.

As the visit drew nearer, those in Jonestown and representing Jones and the Temple began to feel some heat. Mark Lane, an attorney for Peoples Temple, demanded that Ryan postpone the trip. He indicated that the temple was under siege by various government agencies, and indicated that they were threatening to move to a country with "hostile" relations to the US should they feel they were being scrutinized by an unwelcome congressman.[276] Lane echoed the sentiments of many on the left sympathetic to the temple in condemning Ryan's actions as part of a grander "witch hunt" by the US government. Lane reiterated that the Peoples Temple was a "religious institution," seemingly to emphasize their rights under the First Amendment to avoid excessive government interference. Lane's bottom line was to insist that Ryan's party move their trip to a later date when Lane, as Jones's legal counsel, could be present at Jonestown.[277]

Ryan did not take kindly to Lane's combative tone, and unsurprisingly refused to move the trip. He insisted that the inquiry was merely that—a fact-finding mission in order to ascertain the conditions at Jonestown objectively, rather than filtered through the concerns of emotional

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[276] Mark Lane was an important attorney and conspiracy theorist who is best known for his work on the CIA's role in the 1962 John F. Kennedy assassination. Distrust of the American government propelled Lane's legal work as well as his many public-facing writings, press conferences, and other attempts to draw attention to the state's misdeeds. He represented Jones and Peoples Temple beginning in 1978, and consistently alleged that the CIA and others conspired against Jones on account of his radical politics. Lane was at Jonestown during the Ryan visit and the night of the mass death, though he survived. He later recounted his experience at Jonestown in a book entitled: *The Strongest Poison: How I Survived the Jonestown Massacre*.

[277] Letter from Mark Lane to Leo Ryan, November 6 1978, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=13921.

and "biased" relatives. The congressman also rejected Lane's claim of a witch hunt against the Temple, insisting that the "committee asks no more of Mr. Jones than any parent does whose son or daughter is away at school or whose mother or father resides in a distant convalescent home or hospital."[278] In staking this claim, Ryan emphasized that he was acting as a surrogate for the concerned families, rather than as a representative of the US government undertaking a politicized mission to squelch a controversial movement. The trip did not mean the government was closing in on the group; rather, Jones and his people should take it as a welcome opportunity to speak for themselves and refute the growing negative sentiment toward the group in the United States. Ryan took special exception to what he referred to as Lane's "threat" that the inhabitants of Jonestown were considering a move to a hostile country, and seemed awake to the fact that this move would be a complicated and protracted process requiring the consent of the potential American expatriates and the collaborating foreign government.

Ryan arrived in Guyana on November 10, 1978, with a crew of reporters, Concerned Relatives, and aides. After a few days of negotiations, they were allowed to enter Jonestown. On November 18, 1978, his visit ended in infamous tragedy as the congressman and several of his aides were murdered by Temple members on an airstrip in Port Kaituma, Guyana, at the direction of Jones. The residents of Jonestown, under instruction from their leader, had been preparing for mass suicide for over a year, and in the hours after Ryan's murder, Jones instructed them to finally carry out the plan in an act of "revolutionary suicide," to protest capitalism, racism, and the trespasses of the American state. Hundreds of children numbered among the dead. Jones exalted the mass death as a protest against capitalist excess and the evils of the American government. Members famously drank a poisoned mixture of Flavor-Aid (not Kool-Aid), cyanide, and other poisons. Even today, "drinking the Kool-Aid" remains in the American lexicon as slang for blind faith and the perils of willful submission.

Moscone and Milk, among other Jones acquaintances, were distraught over the events at Jonestown. The city had little time to regroup and reflect on what had happened, as another tragedy followed soon after. On November 27th, nine days after the Jonestown tragedy, former San Francisco councilman Dan White walked into City Hall and fatally shot Harvey Milk and Mayor George Moscone. One observer noted: "It felt like the world was imploding…It marked the end of the Utopian ideal for the Bay Area."[279] To say that Jonestown ended the 1970s, or the left in the Bay Area, is to overstate its emblematic importance and explanatory value. At the same time, it seemed to reflect a turning point, as the progressive Christianity of the Carter-era and the 1960s gave way to the Reagan revolution. The legacy of leftwing church activism left behind by the Peoples Temple seemed to dissipate, and now we remember most clearly the rise of the Moral Majority in 1979. This forgetting gestures to why it is worth recuperating the political significance of the Peoples Temple, and of its life as more than a mere cult.

It is impossible to draw a straight line between the future of the Democratic party, a party based around coalitions, interest groups, and increasingly more centrist economic policies and what happened in Guyana. Without question, though, Jonestown occasioned a crisis that reverberated throughout the United States, in which everyday people, the media, and religious leaders and believers reckoned with questions of religious freedom and religious violence. Jonestown catapulted the cult wars into national prominence. Many members of the ACM felt vindicated, if distraught, and saw this as a moment to make their case to the public and to the

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[278]Letter from Leo Ryan to Mark Lane, November 10 1978, from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/RyanToLane.pdf.

[279] Paul Vandecarr, "DEATH of DREAMS.," *Advocate*, no. 903 (November 25, 2003): 32.

government. NRMs and their allies in the mainstream saw the grave threat of religious persecution. For the Unification Church, it was a moment of both danger and opportunity, and they were prepared when Bob Dole announced that he would once again be holding a hearing on Capitol Hill to discuss the matter of cults in the United States.

Chapter 4:
"In Too Many Ways Our Holocaust": Responses to the Jonestown Tragedy

After Saturday, November 18th, 1978, international news organizations began reporting that Jim Jones, leader of Peoples Temple, had ordered his followers to commit suicide at their compound in Guyana. The following day, the *New York Times* reported that a congressman, Representative Leo J. Ryan of California, died trying to escape the country. Then on Monday, Jonestown coverage plastered the front page, with the *Times* reporting that three hundred had died. Tuesday, the number rose to 400. One woman, Nina Berry, recalled harrowing childhood memories of this time decades later. Forty years had passed, and she wrote in 2019 that she could still "hear my mother wailing and screaming" with a sound "so piercing, so painful and scary." They sat in their home, listening to the names of the dead at Jonestown as they were read out over the radio. She remembers that "there were so many names being read, it felt like forever…but when my granny's name was called out, everything else fell silent."[280] Many families experienced some version of this heartbreaking revelation. In the end, the final count was 918 dead, including 304 minors. Nine hundred and nine people died at Jonestown itself—907 of cyanide poisoning, Jones and Annie Moore of gunshot wounds. Four others—a mother who killed her three children before taking her own life—perished in the Guyanese capital of Georgetown. Congressman Ryan, three members of the press who had accompanied him on his trip to Jonestown, and one Temple defector were shot to death by their Peoples Temple escorts at the airstrip at Port Kaituma as they tried to return to the United States at the end of their trip. Eighty-seven Temple members who were in Guyana survived, as did Jackie Speier, Ryan's aide who was shot and badly injured at Port Kaituma.

Gruesome pictures flashed across news reports on television and in the papers. Hundreds of lifeless, bloated bodies laid face-down, neatly organized next to one another. One imagined that the Temple members obediently drank the cyanide-laced Flavor-Aid and then peacefully walked over to their neighbor to lay down and die. Although most drank the poison willingly, there were struggles. Some pleaded with Jones to stop the madness. Leaders in the Temple, many of whom were still alive when Jones died by a self-inflicted gunshot wound to the head, carried out Jones's orders to arrange bodies and make the deaths look peaceful. The tragedy, the largest loss of American civilian life before the 9/11 attacks in 2001, raised many questions. Why would so many people take their own lives and those of their own children and families? Why did Jim Jones have such tremendous power over his followers, and how did he exercise it? Why didn't the American or Guyanese governments take action to ensure the safety of those at Jonestown and of Congressman Ryan? Was there some greater conspiracy afoot? Was this a cult, and what could be done about the other cults thriving in the United States? What did this mean for religious communities and those of faith in general?

The moment immediately after Jonestown was chaotic, contingent, and uncertain. Just as the news poured in day by day, creating a fuller if increasingly surreal picture, the effort to make meaning from the tragic events was uneven. Anticult activists understood Jonestown as the logical conclusion of cult membership, and they seized the opportunity to make their case to a devastated and confused public. The Unification Church and allies of NRMs more broadly immediately defended themselves, knowing that such a time of high emotion could lead to overly broad and potentially devastating reaction against NRMs and religions in general. Both

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[280] Nina Berry, "Life Would Never Be the Same," from the Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/?page_id=92747.

turned to Senator Bob Dole, who had for several years been the congressional point person on cult issues. Dole quickly organized a hearing about the "cult phenomenon," but found the planning and execution of the actual event to be more controversial than he had bargained for. Dole found himself in the same predicament he had been in since 1976, but amplified. He had to toe the line between affirming his duty toward the First Amendment and religious freedom, and advocating for the danger of cults and pseudo-religions. Further, the American system contains few avenues for the regulation and investigation of religions.[281] One of the only weapons in Dole's arsenal was the IRS and its power to revoke the tax exempt status of NRMs. As the Chair of the Finance Committee in the Senate, this was in Dole's wheelhouse. But this tactic, which had been controversial from the beginning, became increasingly fraught within Dole's own party in this period as the taxation of religious institutions, including schools, became a battleground for the nascent culture wars and the mobilization of the religious right.

As a result of Jonestown, Peoples Temple moved from legitimate religious organization to cult in the eyes of the public. Its downfall, however, presented a unique opportunity for the most visible target of the ACM: the Unification Church. Jonestown made the cult wars a national issue, and as such enabled both sides to plead their case to the American public. Ultimately, post-Jonestown debates marked clear sides in the cult wars, and thrust their implication for religious freedom into the center of public discourse. For years, NRMs had been arguing that they deserved to be respected and left alone as religions, rather than persecuted and investigated as cults. In the wake of Jonestown, the actual possibility that the government would intervene in NRM affairs woke up mainstream religious leaders, who for the first time came to the defense of NRMs on a national scale. The UC was at the center of this process, sounding alarms of the chilling potential of a post-Jonestown government crackdown on minority religions. It had long argued that it was a church within the legitimate American Judeo-Christian tradition, and that it had been unfairly hounded for its beliefs rather than any wrongdoing. The horrific events

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[281] Religious freedom is a highly contested term, and the subject of much scholarly debate and analysis. Scholars like Tisa Wenger, Winnifred Fallers Sullivan and Charles McCrary have written on the ways in which religious freedom has developed historically and unevenly for different religious and racial groups. Wenger, for instance, argues that religious freedom has been both a means of marginalized groups gaining acceptance in the United States as well as a tool of empire and privileging white, hegemonic Christianity. McCrary has explored the ways in which one of the fundamental tasks of the secular state, as in the U.S., is to define, regulate, and incorporate religion. This is especially relevant in the case of NRMs, who have forced courts and others to decide what counts as an authentic religion. Important cases in this regard include: *People v. Murphy,* (98 Misc.2d 235 (1977), which declared the Hare Krishna a bona fide religion and rejected the state's claim that the group had participated in mind control or coercive control; *Katz v. Superior Court* (73 Cal. App. 3d 952, 141 Cal. Rptr. 234, 1977), also known as the Faithful Five/Faithless Four case, in which after a long protracted appeals process, the court of appeals decided that conservatorship orders in the case of five Unification Church members violated their rights to freedom of association and freedom of religion. The Church of Scientology has been at the center of a number of legal disputes about its status as a religion, as it fought for 25 years between 1967 and 1993 to regain its tax-exempt religious status. For more on religious freedom in American history see: Charles McCrary, "Superstitious Subjects: US Religion, Race, and Freedom," *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 30, no. 1 (2018): 56–70; Christopher L. Eisgruber, *Religious Freedom and the Constitution* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007); Sarah Barringer Gordon, *The Spirit of the Law: Religious Voices and the Constitution in Modern America* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2010); Anna Su, *Exporting Freedom: Religious Liberty and American Power* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2016); Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom: New Edition*, *The Impossibility of Religious Freedom* (Princeton University Press, 2018); Tisa Wenger, *Religious Freedom: The Contested History of an American Ideal* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2017).

surrounding Peoples Temple gave the UC an opportunity to make its case once again, and to distinguish itself from Jones and his followers theologically, spiritually, and politically. Where PT members had centered Jones, the UC centered God. The UC loved the United States and cherished its capitalistic and Democratic systems, unlike the communist Peoples Temple. Further, it successfully argued that the primary issue at hand religious freedom broadly, not as Bob Dole and the ACM claimed, a distinct "cult phenomenon."

The ACM argued that the safety of children and the sanctity of the family demanded urgent attention to the cult matter. These demands clashed with those of NRMs and their allies to prioritize religious freedom. While this conflict had been brewing since 1971 when parents first banded together to organize against NRM recruitment, the late 1970s and early 1980s represented the apex of fears of cult violence and concomitant fears of government repression. Thus, after Jonestown, cult war battles reified an ideological struggle: one the one hand, family values with the ACM centering children in their demands for government inquiry into cult activities. On the other, religious freedom deployed in defense of the Unification Church and other minority religions as risk of persecution.

The cult wars thus narrowed definitions of both family and religion. This episode was pivotal to the larger shift from the broadly political cult wars into the more partisan culture wars: while in this moment the UC argued against government interference into minority religions broadly, it simultaneously made a bid for its inclusion within a narrow and conservative conception of acceptable religion. The UC not only claimed to be a legitimate church rather than a cult: with the Christian Right ascendant in the early 1980s, the church shaped itself within the "Judeo-Christian tradition," embracing conservatism, patriotism, and heterosexual, monogamous ideas about sex and marriage. Its successful lobbying for protection as a member of the larger American religious milieu not only helped ensure that no federal government action would be taken against NRMs, but also helped set up the group's future alliances within the religious right. Ultimately, the post-Jonestown fracas created conditions through which the UC transformed into a legitimate, if unorthodox, church. This would prove critical to its success in the 1980s, and particularly Reverend Moon's reception as a martyr of religious persecution upon his release from prison for tax fraud in 1985. At the same time, Jonestown discredited other NRMs and non-traditional movements which did not fit so easily into the conservative milieu. Thus Jonestown, and the media which followed it, both secured legal protections for NRMs while also creating a lasting and damaging association of NRMs with violence, which would prove especially harmful to those which could not fit narrow models of politically conservative churchdom.

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The reactions to Jonestown were a Rorschach test. In attempting to make meaning of the death and grief, various parties saw what they wanted and demanded conflicting outcomes. No one wanted another Jonestown, but what was the cost of using the might of the federal government to ensure someone like Jones couldn't wreak this sort of destruction again? One reporter for the *Congressional Quarterly* insisted that the "insanity exemplified by Jonestown was a unique aberration, without parallel in other religious communities."[282] This nicely summed up the position of the federal government, as well as various religious organizations including

[282] William Korns, "Cults in America and Public Policy," in *Editorial Research Reports 1979*, CQ Researcher Online (Washington, D.C., United States: CQ Press, 1979), 265–84, http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/cqresrre1979041300.

the most persecuted "cult" in the nation, the Unification Church. Insane; unique; aberrational: the horrors at Jonestown were not part of some larger plot, nor were they even indicative of the violent possibilities of other minority religions to which Peoples Temple would be compared. By contrast, for anticult activists and many other Americans, this view did not take seriously the real danger that only government intervention could curb. Jonestown made real the worst fears of people like Ted Patrick, Jim Rudin, and others who had spent the 1970s desperately sounding the alarm of the cult threat. For them, Jonestown was far from an aberration to be downplayed as tragic but singular. Instead, it was the logical, even expected, outcome of antidemocratic and unregulated groups which posed as religions. Unchecked leaders with total power over their adherents could descend into violent mania, as Jones had, with unspeakable outcomes.

Although news reports stressed the remoteness of the Guyanese jungle, the mass death at the Jonestown compound felt very close to home in San Francisco. Most of the dead were from or had resided in the city, and Geary Street in the mostly African-American Fillmore district housed the Temple's home base. George Moscone, the mayor, was completely distraught by the news. Moscone had close political ties to Jones, but also had a close friendship with Leo Ryan, with whom he had risen as a contemporary in California Democratic politics. In fact, when Ryan was reported to be "out of touch" though not confirmed dead, Moscone left a fundraiser at Trader Vic's to do a quick interview on Ryan in an alley with NBC news and to express his concern.[283] He wept heavily at his friend's funeral, which was held at All Souls Church in South San Francisco. Moscone spent what would turn out to be the last days of his life wracked with guilt and grief over the events in Guyana. He understood himself as one of Jones's dupes but not his accomplice, admitting "we were taken in" by Jones's charms, but at the same time "I'm not taking any responsibility. It's not mine to shoulder."[284] Willie Brown stood his ground more solidly, dismissing "bullshit" apologies by Jones's former political allies: "My blood runs cold when I think about what's happened in the last few days, but there's no way anyone in his right mind could have projected what would happen." His choice to appear at Peoples Temple and alongside Jones "was not a faulty judgment at the time it was made" based on his "relevant knowledge."[285] San Franciscans had a brief window in which to grieve Jonestown alone. A mere nine days later on November 27, Mayor Moscone and another Jones ally, gay rights icon Harvey Milk, were assassinated at City Hall by disgruntled former city councilman Dan White.

President Jimmy Carter, whose wife Rosalynn had had contact with Jones, reacted with sympathy but also resolve. He latched on immediately to the Jonestown-as-aberration hypothesis. His administration's strong and immediate response reassured those concerned about religious persecution that no action would be taken against minority religions. Carter, in a press conference a couple of weeks after the deaths, firmly told reporters that "the Jonestown cult" was not "typical in any way of America." However horrific, the tragedy did not occur on American soil, and the U.S. government could not have prevented what happened. While Carter conceded that Ryan had approached the Justice Department about "the so-called brainwashing aspects of a few religious cults," Peoples Temple was not among them. For anyone wondering if the

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[283] Rick Laubscher, "Rick Laubscher: Forty Years of Giving Back to San Francisco, From KRON to Market Street Railway," interview by Todd Holmes in 2016. Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2017, 82.
[284] David Talbot, *Season of the Witch,* 167.
[285] Jerry Burns, "Willie Brown Defends Former Ties to Rev. Jones," *The San Francisco Chronicle*, November 21, 1978.

government had plans to take wide scale action in the wake of Jonestown, Carter confirmed his administration's unchanging position:

> So I don't think that we ought to have an overreaction because of the Jonestown tragedy by injecting government into trying to control people's religious beliefs and I believe that we also don't need to deplore on a nationwide basis the fact that the Jonestown cult, socalled, was typical of America, because it's not.[286]

Attorney General Griffin Bell likewise spoke for the Carter administration when he reiterated that because of American religious and political cultural norms, "we do not go about investigating religious groups."[287] Thus while Deputy Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti reassured Americans that the Justice Department would investigate the horrific events, and that a criminal investigation of the murder of Congressman Ryan was already underway, the focus was on mass death, not the religion of Peoples Temple. All Carter administration officials carefully stressed that though the events at Jonestown, and the only assassination of a sitting US congressperson in history, would be investigated with all the might of the American government, this dogged approach would not extend to "cult groups" writ large.

Carter's reticence to get involved in the cult controversy was characteristic of his administration's consistent commitment to the separation of church and state, and represented an ongoing resistance to take an anticult stance. Before Jonestown, some members of Congress—including Leo Ryan—had lobbied the Carter administration before to intervene on behalf of parents of "brainwashed" NRM members, to no avail. In 1977, Democratic Congressman Bob Giaimo of Connecticut approached the DOJ armed with a manuscript by Richard Delgado of UCLA, perhaps the most famous anticult law professor. While Civiletti, the assistant attorney general, assured Rep. Giaimo that the FBI was interviewing experts on these matter—including influential anticult psychiatrist Margaret Singer—they reiterated that there was little they could do as long as "allegations" of 'brainwashing,' 'mind control,' 'thought reform,' and 'coercive persuasion'" did not meet the legal standard for prosecution as kidnapping crimes. Civiletti reviewed findings in the case brought against ISKCON (Hare Krishna) in New York in 1976, in which Judge Patrick Leahy dismissed the charges because regulating the behavior of a religious group would open up a "Pandora's Box" of religious persecution. Civiletti then put the matter of the government's position on mind control to rest, in a statement that would be widely quoted in the wake of Jonestown: "it has been our experience that members of these religious sects are apparently competent consenting adults. In our view, evidence that sect members do not have the capacity to exercise a free will is inconclusive."[288] The federal government hewed to this position—neither the Carter Administration nor most of Congress wanted to engage in a politically toxic witch-hunt against minority religions, even amid the outcry over the deaths at Jonestown.

Disappointed anticult activists turned to a familiar ally: Kansas Senator Robert Dole. Dole would organize the "Informational Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States," sometimes referred to as the Dole hearing or Dole meeting, held on February 5, 1979. This was the only public meeting held by Congress on the cult issue, per se, and a high point of the cult

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[286] No Author, Transcript of President's News Conference on Foreign and Domestic Matters, *The New York Times,* December 1, 1978.
[287] Bell quoted in Korns, "Cults in America and Public Policy," Editorial Research Reports, April 13, 1979.
[288] "Justice Department's Position on "Brainwashing" and Cults," *Congressional Record* 123 (1977) p. 27090. (Text from: *Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection*); accessed April 27, 2022.

wars. Dole was the ideal person to hold this event because of years of documented relationships with concerned parents of NRM members and highly public meeting about the Unification Church in 1976. The meeting fit into his presidential aspirations, too. People throughout the nation were clamoring for government response to the horrors at Jonestown, and the Democratic administration was shiftless. Dole would position himself as an ally of parents everywhere and set himself up to run against Carter in 1980 as a tough, family-minded, responsive leader. What seemed politically expedient in the wake of Jonestown turned out to be a political powder keg. Unfortunately for Senator Dole, the so-called cult issue was more sensitive than he imagined, and the announcement of the hearings led to a firestorm of criticism from free speech and freedom of religion advocates. It also solidified an alliance of the Unification Church (on behalf of NRMs) and mainstream religious organizations and institutions which would prove critical in the 1980s. Dole, a Republican, consistently painted his opposition to and concern over the cults as a conservative, pro-family stance, but his willingness to use government to interfere in religious affairs did not align with the rising tide of his party. The Dole meeting represented a moment in which demands for religious freedom bucked up against family values rhetoric, rather than the more familiar fusion of the two issues as rhetorical devices deployed by the Christian right.

When he announced his intention to hold the meeting in two weeks' time, Dole deployed family values rhetoric, emphasizing that he acted on behalf of parents and their children. As far back as 1976, Dole noted, he had acted as a liaison between government officials and "parents of children in cults."[289] Dole painted a picture of his constituents as concerned parents, numbering in the thousands, clamoring for answers about this strange Unification Church, if it could even be called a church at all. Dole voiced a common concern about the political activities of the group, implying that though it fronted as a church in order to gain tax exempt status and respectability, it was in reality far from a normal religious organization. Dole's inquiries centered on these two issues: assuaging the concerns of parents, and ensuring that the Unification Movement's tax-exempt status was appropriate. This was how Dole, and others, tended to thread the needle between questioning the motives, activity, and legitimacy of NRMs while also maintaining a commitment to religious freedom. Recognizing that the government could do little more than investigate the religious status of the groups, they set about doing so as they promoted the concerns of parents and relatives of group members.

But Dole did not necessarily foresee how quickly mainstream religious groups, as well as civil liberties advocates, would team up with the Unification Church and bring religious freedom issues front and center. The Unification Church perceived it would be a primary target of suspicion and discussion in the wake of Jonestown. The UC was front of mind for many people, especially those with long-held concerns about powerful shadowy cults with government connections. The church chose to go on the offensive after the announcement of the second Dole meeting. Rather than frame the issue as one about "cults," the UC worked quickly to make the issue one of religious freedom. This strategy paid off, as its success in portraying itself as a small and young religious group made it seem vulnerable and aligned them with older, more established groups who were willing to stand with it for the cause of religious freedom. NRM scholar James R. Lewis has pointed out that anticult activists have had much more success in

[289] Press Release, "Dole to Sponsor Hearing on the Cult Phenomenon," January 23 1979, Digitized Press Releases Collection, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

winning PR battles against their foes than they have legal ones.[290] Media and perception were, thus, key battlegrounds in the cult wars. Whether or not the meeting had initially been planned with the UC in mind, the group's active reframing of the post-Jonestown moment worked in its favor, as it allowed them to gain some control over the media narrative in this new, uncertain landscape.

In a public statement released soon after Jonestown, the Unification Church argued for its place firmly within the dominant American religious tradition, emphasizing its roots in and commitment to normative religion, rather than defending itself as a distinct religious minority entitled to religious freedom under the First Amendment. "The Unification Church," it insisted, "is *not* a cult. It is a bona fide religious movement, based on Judeo-Christian values and led by the living God." The UC shared little with Peoples Temple: the UC was religious and Christian, not communistic and dogmatic like Jones's group, which merely masqueraded as a legitimate religion. Its small size should not count against it, for hadn't Christianity and all the sects now "cornerstones of the world's great religions" begun small, "usually centered on divinely inspired leaders?" It would be a grave error for the government, acting on the whims of the emotional public, to take Jonestown as an opportunity to persecute small religions. It quoted Benjamin Civiletti's 1977 letter to Bob Giaimo, pointing out that in fact the government had already investigated charges of brainwashing and mind-control and had found no evidence in support of these claims.

The groups' respective political orientations, especially in terms of their relationship to normative family values and communism, were crucial to the UC's arguments. Where the Peoples Temple had been dogmatically Marxist, the UC was "decidedly anti-Communist." Jones's group and the community they formed more closely resembled the societies of communist China or Cambodia than anything the Unification movement would aspire to. It emphasized its opposition to communism, but more importantly relied on arguing for its own religious legitimacy. Specifically, this legitimacy relied on the fact that the movement "adheres firmly to the Judeo-Christian system of moral values. Its religious philosophy, the Divine Principle, is based on the Bible. Its members are converted by these teachings not the personality of Reverend Moon."[291] The media fixated on Jones's sexual proclivities and custody issues caused by Jones's sexual relationships with Temple members. The Unification Church attempted to counter the perception that all members of minority religions were sexually deviant or sought to undermine the family structure, insisting that "the Unification Church strongly emphasizes the nuclear family unit as the basis of a moral society," and that its single members may live communally but only to participate in "a program of disciplined Christian love in preparation for a successful, God-centered marriage." Significantly, the statement deemphasized the role of Reverend Moon himself, clearly acknowledging the negative stigma around the idea of a cult of personality. Moon, it claimed, was merely interpreting the Bible safely within the bounds of theological orthodoxy—like any other Christian sect, its members were not attracted to Moon as a charismatic leader but rather to the faith itself.

The concept of "Judeo-Christian" as a stand-in for legitimate, American religion did important political work in the statement and, more broadly, in this period. Historian Healan Gaston has noted that the notion of Judeo-Christian identity was seen by some as a "bulwark against totalitarianism" since the latter's inception. In the 1950s, as the Cold War heated up, the

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[290] James R. Lewis, *Cults: A Reference and Guide* (London, United Kingdom: Taylor & Francis Group, 2014), 3.
[291] Statement of the Unification Church on the Guyana Tragedy, Box 116, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.

threat of the Godless Communists needed to be met by pious defenders of democracy. "Judeo-Christian" as a concept took on increasing resonance in the 1970s not only against foreign totalitarian enemies, but those closer to home who promoted increasingly liberal and secular cultural mores as well as beliefs beyond the narrow fold of Judeo-Christian belief.[292] In the context of the coalescing Christian right, with whom it shared many political aims, UC used the progressive Peoples Temple as a foil to argue for its legitimacy. A critical tactic of the cult wars involved the ACM casting NRMs as antithetical to interlocking conceptions of faith, family, and political economy, all of which undergirded American success. The Unification Church thus in this moment argued for its place *within* the Judeo-Christian fold in order to counter its ostracized status, linked to charges that it was anti-family, irreligious, and un-American.

But acceptance into the religious mainstream would not come immediately nor unilaterally. Jewish and mainstream religious groups offered a huge range of responses to Jonestown, some of which implicated the Unification Church as an ongoing threat. Some familiar NRM foes, like Jim Rudin, took a hard anticult stance. Others who shared a prior interest in NRMs had to balance discomfort with government interference into religion with genuine concern over cults. Preachers like Billy Graham saw Jonestown as a symptom of larger cultural maladies like secularism and decline, which could only be remedied by an infusion of faith at a personal and public level. Others still felt that religion itself had failed people, and that Jonestown demanded religious leaders look inward to find a better way forward for themselves and their flocks.

As in the pre-Jonestown world rabbis like Davis, Jim Rudin, and Balfour Brickner were divided in their opinions of how society, government, and Jews should understand and react to Jonestown. Davis was the only rabbi to testify at the Dole meeting, but other longtime cult-watchers reacted in writing and sermons. Jim Rudin felt horrified, but not surprised at the events. While most Americans might have found the events at Jonestown "unreal," "unbelievable," or "incredible," he was not among them.[293] Stunned by the magnitude of the tragedy, he wasn't surprised that cult membership had resulted in mass death. The cult problem remained pervasive—Rudin claimed that at least two thousand groups were still running rampant—and wholly incompatible with healthy religious expression. The groups were "authoritarian at best, totalitarian at worst." By definition they limited the intellectual, personal, and spiritual freedom of their members. The recruits rarely joined for "ideological or theological reasons," but rather because of a deep sense of alienation and dissatisfaction. Various anticultists, and Jewish anti-cult thinkers in particular, had made these arguments for years. It was the paucity of fulfillment that drew youngsters into the groups, rather than any kind of positive quality. This was untrue: many members of Peoples Temple joined because the movement promised a spiritually-fulfilling society free from racist and capitalist constructions that limited full Black citizenship in the United States. Rudin, though, was not interested in the utopian visions of various movements.

For Rudin, just as pressing as the events at Jonestown was what to do about the most problematic active group in the United States: the Unification Church. Rudin lauded the American Jewish Committee's work against the group, pointing out that his organization had been countering their influence for years. For Rudin and the AJC, it was the near ubiquitous antisemitism found in this and other groups that was most threatening. Alienated young people

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[292] Gaston, *Inventing Judeo-Christian America*, 12.

[293] A. James Rudin, "My Mind Was Blown Away," in a reprint of Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Philadelphia, "The Challenge of the Cults: a Report of the Special Committee on Exotic Cults," 1979, Cults Nearprint, Nearprint Special Topics Collection, American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati.

were lured in by promise of fellowship and meaning, and the result was family separation and a weakening of American Jewish life. The correct response was increased education of Jewish kids, and "interpretation" of cult activity. The establishment of Jewish hostels in major cities and other efforts to strengthen national Jewish bonds would be critical in stemming the still rising tide of cults. Toward the end of the essay, Rudin quotes one perhaps apocryphal interaction:

> "Why didn't you leave the group earlier?" a former cultist, a Jew, was asked.
>
> "I was physically assaulted - afraid I would be beaten or followed or harassed, or even killed," he answered.
>
> "Killed by a community of love and acceptance?"
>
> "Yes, killed for love."

In spite of the harshly judgmental and alarmist tone of this and other screeds against the cults, Rudin nonetheless displayed a sense of compassion for those drawn in by promises of love and community. It was society that had failed members, rather than a psychological or spiritual weakness. Thus, the problem was everyone's to confront.

Balfour Brickner, who had long evinced a more tolerant attitude toward NRMs, articulated a similar view in this sermon "America's Dream Time: the New Spiritual and Legal Nightmare," given a few weeks after Jonestown. Brickner agreed emphatically that there was little theological draw in the cults, but the alienation of young people had to be addressed in order to remedy NRM recruitment. Middle class white kids were as likely to join groups as were "poor blacks or southern illiterate rednecks."[294] Brickner acknowledged a spiritual crisis, but nonetheless warned that "equally tragic may be the hysterical reactive demand that 'somebody do something' to stop the cults, even if that action is not just those counterproductive but in violation of those very freedoms that enable all religions to function in America."[295] Indeed, he warned against post-Jonestown impulses where "rage supplants sadness…Throughout America voices can already be heard calling on 'someone' or 'something' to 'do something.' 'Someone,' becomes a euphemism for the government and 'do' is all too frequently a plea or restrictive legislation directed at 'them'—those with deviate beliefs and rituals different from 'mine.'"[296] He decried cults as in no uncertain terms "revolting," but the cure here would be worse than the disease.

Brickner argued that Jews, of all people, should understand the dangers of legal recourse at the bidding of a hysterical public which would seek to limit the autonomy of minority religions. He explicitly aligned himself with President Carter and Civiletti; Carter, Brickner insisted, was not acting as a "fundamentalist Christian" but as a President seeking to protect his own people from the angry and unreasonable angels of their own nature.[297] Religious groups should not be seen as above the law or exempt from the intervention of law enforcement. But communities themselves had the responsibility to self-regulate: "Beyond our press of the

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[294] Balfour Brickner, "America's Dream Time: The New Spiritual and Legal Nightmare," December 6, 1978, 1, box 1, folder 29, Responses to Jonestown Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.
[295] Brickner, "America's Dream Time," 2.
[296] Brickner, "America's Dream Time," 5.
[297] Brickner, "America's Dream Time," 6.

government, however, the private sector, in this context America's organized religious community, has an obligation to put its own house in order…What happened at Guyana may be as much an indictment of organized religion as it is a revelation of the demonic power of Jim Jones." This echoed the longstanding sense among Jewish leaders that in fact they were facing a crisis of their own relevance rather than a nefarious outside threat.

Christian churches and leaders likewise expressed a range of reactions to the tragedy, many of which sought to balance distinguishing themselves from Peoples Temple but also warning that overreaction on the part of the government could have dangerous implications for religions in general. In other words, many tried to claim—as various anticult activists, secular and religious long had done—that the Temple was a cult, not a religion. Still, they conceded that it would be wrong to regulate or persecute these movements because of the difficulty in distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate religions. Attempts to separate PT from legitimate churches were complicated by the fact that the Temple was affiliated with Disciples of Christ, a widely known Christian denomination in which Jones became an ordained minister in 1965. Many responses then became a game of interdenominational distinction but also, to some degree, religious solidarity.

As among Jewish religious leaders, some mainline Christians took the tragedy as an opportunity to reflect on their own institutional shortcomings and their proximity to the political, spiritual, and ethical crisis that had caused Jonestown. One editorial from the *Arkansas Methodis*t put the issue most bluntly: "'nice churches"—like the mainline churches—don't have such things happening in their establishments."[298] Methodists had not been guilty of such "psychotic" behavior as witnessed in Peoples Temple. At the same time, "cults" like PT were tremendously popular, which itself pointed to a failure on the part of mainline religions. The *Methodist Christian Advocate* in Birmingham, AL took the events at Jonestown in a different way, claiming that in fact the tragedy "emphasiz[ed] the value and strength of institutional religion as contrasted with cult religion." Jones had failed to meet the requirements to be ordained as a Methodist minister, and though he had been ordained by the Disciples of Christ, by the time of the tragedy he had strayed so far from the teachings of that church that his actions were hardly an indictment of the denomination itself. For the editors of this piece, Jonestown was also a call to action: while Jones and his flock fled the world, retreating to the Guyanese jungle, real Christians should "[remain] in the world and seek to change it."[299] This is especially notable in the context of the re-emergence of more fundamentalists in public life in the late 1970s. In an op-ed in the *New York Times*, America's most famous evangelist Billy Graham, attributed the horrors at Jonestown to Satan. Like others, Graham saw Jonestown as a symptom of a deeper spiritual sickness, as "thousands are turning to gurus and cults of various sorts. Voodooism, satanism, witchcraft and other demonic forms have emerged from their closets to haunt us in our generation." He warned that only a recommitment to true Christianity could save us: "only a transformation of the heart can give man a new sense of direction, a right purpose and meaning for living."[300] The Jonestown tragedy indeed occurred at the same moment as conservative Christians were forming the most sophisticated and consolidated political coalitions and groups that they ever had. As Graham, Jerry Falwell, and others geared up for the 1980

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[298] No author, "Tragedy in Guyana: the Issues at Jamestown [sic]," November 30, 1978, box 1, folder 4, Responses to Jonestown Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.
[299] No author, "Lessons for Society from the Jonestown Tragedy," January 2, 1979, box 1, folder 20, Responses to Jonestown Collection, Graduate Theological Union Archives, Berkeley, California.
[300] Billy Graham, "Billy Graham, On the Devil and Mr. Jones," *The New York Times*, December 5, 1978.

election and attempted to woo evangelical voters away from the Democratic incumbent, questions of faith, morality, and cultural malaise were becoming more pressing by the day.

The issue of children—whether this meant offspring or minors—had long been at the center of the cult wars. Parents had argued that their children, young adult converts to NRMs, were in danger, and that more broadly cults had the potential to disrupt the family, causing fissures between relatives as well as destroying the people who had joined so thoroughly that their families no longer recognized them. If the anticult activists frequently parlayed fears of child abuse into public sentiment against minority religions, Jonestown suggested that their grim warnings were justified, or at least deserved some consideration. Among most painful issues at hand was the number of children who perished at Jonestown, and in particular the number of children who had been in the California system and were not taken to Jonestown by their biological families. Jonestown thus gave pre-existing anticult parental fears real child victims, as well as ammunition to those accusing the liberal Democratic government of being unable and/or unwilling to protect children. This leant itself easily to anti-statist suspicions of the corrupt and mismanaged government which housed and abused children "in the system" for the benefit of that same corrupt system. Carter's foes on the right, in particular the burgeoning evangelical right, harped consistently on the idea that Carter and the Democrats did not care about children or families, whether because of their culturally permissive politics, devotion to the corrupt and bloated welfare state, or some combination. Indeed, many Americans saw bureaucracy and Jones's ability to navigate the corrupt liberal governance in the state of California in particular as enabling the heinous crimes that led to the deaths of 304 children.

In reality, none of the children who perished at Jonestown were foster children, meaning that they were not legal wards of the state at the time of their death, but still Jonestown made certain journalists and government agencies look critically at the system overall.[301] Many people found it deeply disturbing that any children at all had been handed over to Peoples Temple, when clearly there was not appropriate oversight of their conditions. Some commentators, like journalist Kenneth Wooden, took this as a sign that the government was not equipped to protect kids in the system. In article for the *San Francisco Examiner*, "the Lost Children of Guyana," Wooden suggested that government corruption, specifically Jones's close political connections, allowed him unprecedented access to vulnerable populations—in particular children.[302] Wooden called for politicians and organizations to speak out and demand investigations into the children who were, legally, the children of governor Jerry Brown. Wooden used the occasion of Jonestown, and silence around the dead foster children, as a means of pointing to deeper systemic issues around the shameful treatment of foster kids. Several years earlier, Wooden wrote "Weeping in the Playtime of Others," a scathing critique of juvenile incarceration and the political bidding that kept children "warehoused," mistreated, and in grave physical and psychic danger. Both this and his book *The Children of Jonestown* focused on the problem of child abuse

[301] Jonestown did not motivate the government to act against minority religions in general, but it did lead to some investigation of guardianship and the role of the government in protecting kids. A little more than a year after the tragedy, the Controller General's office issued a report entitled: "GUYANA TRAGEDY POINTS TO A NEED FOR BETTER CARE AND PROTECTION OF GUARDIANSHIP CHILDREN." Though it pointed out that none of the children who died in Guyana were in foster care at the time of the tragedy, the report suggested that the state of California did not adequately protect children who were in Guyana under guardianships. For instance, members of the Temple had been able to illegally transport children outside of the US, when they were not supposed to leave the state of California.

[302] Kenneth Wooden, "the Lost Children of Guyana," *The San Francisco Examiner*, January 4, 1979.

as a result of state guardianship. Wooden also made it a point to call out the apparent hypocrisy of the Carter administration and those in power. If, as Carter declared in tandem with the UN, 1979 was the "Year of the Child," why had they reacted to the horror of Jonestown, a site of unimaginable child abuse, with "only silence." Wooden's work reverberated: according to historian Philip Jenkins, Wooden's work and by extension Jonestown itself "pioneered the notion of cults 'ritually abusing' young people."[303]

As debates over the political and spiritual meaning of Jonestown raged across the nation, on January 23, 1979, Dole officially announced that he would hold a hearing on Capitol Hill about the "cult phenomenon" in the United States with the support of a bipartisan cadre of congressmen. In the initial press conference Dole used the word "hearing" to describe the event; in subsequent statements, including his own official and unofficial remarks at the hearing itself, he insisted on the word "meeting" in order to soften the implications of persecution so readily seized on by the UC and others. The purpose of the hearing was to educate members of congress on the cult issue, as well as to "determine what, if any, role government should play in addressing this issue." Dole referred to his own "longstanding personal" interest in cults, and noted that he would continue to press the Senate Finance Committee to investigate the tax-exempt status of "'so-called' religious organizations" as he had for years.[304] Initially, Dole communicated in a direct, almost combative tone. He made clear that it was possible that the government might need to intervene in cult activity, that "so-called" religious groups did not deserve tax exemptions, and that indeed cult recruitment and membership were "long-standing personal" issues for the senator. Over the course of the next nearly two weeks before the meeting, his tone shifted and softened as public debate came to center not only on cults, but on religious freedom and the rights of religious groups more broadly.

Unification Church leadership immediately assumed that their group was the actual target of the allegedly ecumenical summit on the cult issue. The UC considered itself to be the official subject of the inquiry, and made a great deal of public noise about the injustice of Dole's meeting. As soon as it learned of Dole's intention to hold a meeting—before the official announcement, it set about trying to stymie his efforts. Michael Loung Warder, a prominent UC member, wrote to psychic Jeane Dixon asking for her help in reaching Senator Dole. Contacting her because of her knowledge of "the Washington scene and [her] ability of spiritual discernment," Warder emphasized the common ground between Dole and the Church. Noting Dole's presidential ambitions, Warder pondered: "Since the Senator wants to become President, would think he would not want to attack someone who is strongly opposed to communism and who teaches his members to be patriotic. Is there an effective way to reach him to let him know that members of the Church really are working for many of the things the Senator represents?"[305] Warder's letter did little to create a bridge of understanding between the politically conservative church and the senator, and UC members got to work aggressively promoting the dangerous implications of the meeting.

Church members cast themselves as martyrs of a post-Jonestown backlash against unfamiliar religious movements, and furthermore as a persecuted group deeply committed to that

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[303] Philip Jenkins, "Satanism and Ritual Abuse," in *The Oxford Handbook of New Religious Movements*, Oxford Handbooks (Oxford University Press, 2008), 233.

[304] "Dole to Sponsor Hearing on the Cult Phenomenon" press release.

[305] Letter from Michael Loung Warder to Jeane Dixon, January 16 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), Box 302, folder 11, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

most American of values, the freedom of religious expression. This was no benign informational session, but rather was a pointed attack by Senator Dole, a longtime critic and adversary of the UC. Members immediately went on the offensive, flooding the offices of their congressmen with letters in protest, as well as supplying their representatives with a boilerplate letter to send to Senator Dole to express their concerns about the "chilling" effect the meeting would have on the "free exercise of their [UC] religion."[306] The UC claimed that to see the February 5 meeting as a "one-sided propaganda forum against the Unification Church" one needed only to look at the "'experts'" Senator Dole had convened.[307] Indeed, initially the meeting's speaker list read like a who's who in the anticult world. The day after Dole's office announced the hearings, UC president Neil Salonen wrote to Dole personally "formally requesting" that the meeting include Unification Movement points of view. By this point, Salonen distrusted Dole owing to "your [Dole's] previous media-oriented meeting concerning the Church" in 1976, which was merely "a forum for negative hearsay without any Church input" as well as Salonen and Dole's hostile subsequent meeting.

Dole's insistence that the meeting was not about the UC alone, but the broader issue of cults, made him more vulnerable to criticism and outrage from religious leaders broadly. One letter explicitly condemned the meeting as Dole had planned it, and was signed by an illustrious group of representatives from groups including the Unitarian Universalist Association, the United Methodist Church, the National Council of Churches of Christ—Washington office, the United Presbyterian Church, the Lutheran Council, the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs, and the Synagogue Council of America. The signers registered concern that all the witnesses who planned to appear held "definite positions in support of regulation of "cult" activity or efforts to "deprogram" members of such groups." Likewise, "no strong advocates for religious liberty are represented, yet vital First Amendment concerns are at the very heart of the debate about so-called "cults."" They felt spurred to act in the wake of Jonestown, noting that times of "crisis or after tragedies" saw the "greatest risk of over-reacting in ways which offend the Constitutional and ethical standard of religious freedom." The only purpose they could see for the meeting was to inflame the public. Ultimately, "we have seen increasing regulation and surveillance of religious activities by all kinds of government agencies, and are not pleased to find a potentally (sic) flamboyant hearing becoming the vehicle for the genesis of new regulatory effects."[308] Dole acquiesced and invited some of the letter's signers to testify. His invitation was accepted by two of them, Barry Lynn of the United Church of Christ and James E. Wood of the Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs.

Dole's office tried to assess the political risk of such a meeting and to refute the charge that the meeting was a "witchhunt, inquisition, etc." targeting in particular the Unification Church. As the meeting drew nearer, Dole's office rushed to include a more balanced set of voices in order to placate the UC and their allies, as well as a broader subset of the public (religiously affiliated and not) who were concerned about the tenor and purpose of a meeting

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[306] Undated and unsigned letter template, January 2 1976, Press Related Materials Collection, box 50, folder 23, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[307] No author, "Who are Senator Dole's "experts" on "cults"?, ND, Press Related Materials Collection, box 50, folder 23, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[308] Letter from Robert Z. Alpern, et al., to Robert Dole, January 30 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), box 302, folder 16, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

about "cults." One internal memo from Ernie Garcia, one of Senator Dole's legislative assistants, attempted to make a game-plan in the event that things "reach a point during Monday's meeting that will require you to give "equal" time to cult groups."[309] Perhaps the Senator could offer to meet with Moon himself, or there might be a meeting "for the UC and/or other cult groups." Garcia noted, echoing the frustration of Dole himself, that the problem was the "obvious over-reaction of the UC." Dole and his office continued to publicly insist this was nothing more than an educational meeting, meant to explore different aspects of the "new phenomenon" of cults. Indeed, Garcia suggested that Dole would be prudent to note that he found the more hardcore anticultists on the panel, like Ted Patrick "suspect." Garcia "strongly urge[d] you [Dole] to question Ted Patrick and others on the panel" so as not to appear overly sympathetic to the most vitriolic enemies of the UC and other NRMs. Dole's office felt further frustration at those "uniformed (sic) and misinformed 'mainline' religious groups" who criticized "this meeting based on what they believe to be the first steps toward regulating religions in this country." The memo doubled down on the professed commitment of Dole and his colleague Senator Mark Hatfield to religious freedom, and suggested that this charge is little more than Moonie deception. In the end, Dole acquiesced and added four advocates for religious freedom/other UC allies, and cut the testimony of several ex-members as to avoid charges of "setting an anti-UC tone to the meeting." Even so, the memo ended with several choice quotes on the UC from the Fraser report lest the senator forget the seriousness of the charges leveled against the group even before Jonestown thrust cults into the public eye.

Dole's team kept careful records of mail received on this issue and tried continually to take the public's temperature. While there was vocal outrage and backlash, polling proved that America remained divided on the matter of further government inquiry into the so-called cult phenomenon. On the day of the meeting, Dole received a letter from George W. Dohrmann, the Executive Vice President of the National Opinion Poll. He had ensured that Dole would receive the organization's polling results early, as he saw public opinion on the matter to be especially pertinent to Dole's efforts. Dohrmann reported that a minority (43%) of Americans "favored Congressional investigation into religious cults" while another 53% opposed it. 6% were undecided on the matter, which Dohrmann cited as one reason that he considered the margin of difference to be "very slim."[310]

Pressure rose as the meeting drew nearer. UC continued to publicly denounce the meeting and garner support from other religious groups, and Dole received nine letters from other members of congress who said that they'd been approached by members of UC demanding accountability for any sort of anticult slant that might make the meeting appear biased. None of his colleagues in congress asked Dole to cancel the meeting, even if that's what their UC constituents wanted. All instead called for a balanced panel in which one view was not prioritized over another. Like Dole himself, other legislators found themselves torn between the highly vocal constituency of UC members, which had chapters all over the country, and others who worried about NRM activity and genuinely believed that the Dole meeting served the crucial public service of exploring cults in response to Jonestown.

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[309] No author, "Fallback position," 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 362, folder 3, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.
[310] Letter from George W. Dohrmann to Robert Dole, February 5 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ernie Garcia), box 302, folder 16, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

The same tension between responding to concerns around cults, and in particular implications for families and young people, and maintaining an appropriate separation between church and state framed the meeting from its earliest moments on the morning of February 5th, 1979. Anticult activists framed their endeavors as the work of concerned parents, and consistently tried to warn all Americans about the potential threat to families that the cults represented. Peoples Temple might not have been public enemy number one in the cult scare of the 1970s—that distinction was reserved for the Unification Church—yet there was nonetheless concerted efforts against them within an anticult framework that transcended the individual concerns of family members and defectors. The Dole meeting was thus the apex of the cult wars, in which individual NRMs as well as "cults" as a theoretical social problem, acted as a proxy for anxieties around the family, changing cultural mores, and religious and political conversion. It also allowed both sides of the cult wars to make their case, as anticult speakers deflected claims that they violated religious rights by insisting on the primacy of family and the safety of children, while NRMs and their allies centered religious freedom in their defense.

The meeting began with Dole and his eight colleagues, from both major parties, stating why they wanted to hold the event and repeatedly affirming that their intention was merely to ask questions, not to persecute or legislate. The UC had succeeded in portraying itself as the target of the meeting, and the congressmen danced around naming specific groups with the exception of Edward Zorinsky, a Democratic senator from Nebraska, who called out the UC by name. Zorinsky spoke of a "duty…to ask questions about the Unification Church, though I do not wish to imply that it and the People's Temple are in any way similar (sic)." He cited the 1978 Fraser committee's congressional investigation of the UC's interactions with Korea, and the "vast" holdings of Sun Myung Moon.[311] The other speakers offered much more general remarks, and introduced an argument that would frame the rest of the meetings. Bob Giaimo (D-CT) put the matter succinctly: while it would be outrageous for the government to repress actual religions, there must be some distinction between actual religious practice and "actions taken in the name of religion."[312] Consistently, the congressmen defended their decision to follow Senator Dole into the murky waters of defining a pseudo-religion over the genuine article because of concerns from parents over their children's membership in NRMs. Senator Zorinsky noted consistent parental concerns over "brainwashing."[313] Representative Austin Murphy (D-PA) thanked Dole for the invitation, before noting that he chose to attend because he had "received comments from concerned parents about their children's affiliations. I have refrained from judging whether the parents are right or their fears are justified."[314] S.I. Hayakawa, California senator and political maverick, acknowledged the controversy of the meeting: "We shouldn't all run the other way because of protests or because someone puts on the pressure. There has been a great deal of pressure. I can think of a couple of my colleagues who decided it was better not to show up here this morning."[315]

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[311] Transcript of Proceedings, "Information Meeting on the Cult Phenomenon in the United States," Washington D.C., February 5, 1979, published by ACE-Federal Reporters, Inc., 13.
[312] Dole meeting transcript, 17.
[313] Dole meeting transcript, 13.
[314] Dole meeting transcript, 17-18.
[315] Hayakawa had a long, interesting career in California and the Bay Area. He was the president of San Francisco State University during the student strike there, which led to the creation of Ethnic Studies programs at SFSU, Berkeley, and other schools. During the strike, Hayakawa became a hero for conservatives as he refused to concede to student demands, though he ultimately relented. He ran as a Republican, and a political outsider, for US Senate in

The large contingent of anticult speakers continued with the theme of parental concerns, and linked these family dramas to larger political threats to the nation posed by the cults. They reiterated a longstanding association between the health of the American family with the health of the American democratic system itself. This rhetoric was common throughout the Cold War period, and would take on new salience in the 1980s as conservatives centered issues of family and a renewed commitment to capitalism and American democracy as a system. Testimony at the Dole meeting thus linked Cold War, cult war, and culture war. Jackie Speier and Bob Boettcher, congressional aids with intimate knowledge of PT and UC, spoke of the political and social dangers of the two movements, which they saw as fundamentally antidemocratic and incompatible with the American system. The psychological experts who testified spoke of brainwashing and sudden personality changes borrowed largely from Robert J. Lifton's work on communist mind control in the 1950s. This testimony was often framed as urgent because of the specific ways in which cults targeted children and families, and witnesses like Ted Patrick and Maurice Davis spoke in graphic terms about physical, spiritual, and psychic violation and assault. At the same time the matter of child safety and minority religions was not only an abstract one about the sanctity of the family: hundreds of children had indeed perished in Guyana, rendering the potential for NRM child endangerment palpable. Still, witnesses spoke less about the children lost at Jonestown than they did the future and theoretical dangers that cults broadly posed to living American youths.

In was in this context that witnesses at the meeting raised alarms about both political and familial dangers. The invited speaker testimony began with a splash, as the first to testify after the opening statements was Jackie Speier, aid to slain congressman Leo Ryan. Speier had accompanied him to Guyana, and was shot in the confrontation at Port Kaituma which left Ryan dead. Speier's testimony aligned with the anticult wing. She stressed the breakdown of the family as the critical piece which allowed Jones to use "mind control" on his vulnerable followers. She immediately attempted to cleave the "cult-y" elements of Peoples Temple from any religious content: "The People's Temple, while not a religious cult, was, without a doubt, a cult (sic)." The lost souls who joined Jones were left unable to cope with the vast changes they saw in society, as the "the breakdown of the family unit in the United States along with individuals' overwhelming desire to be accepted preceded the tragedy we now know as Jonestown…[Cults] offer a ready-made substitute family coupled with a very strong charismatic leader acting as a father figure who has the ability to mesmerize his followers." Though the members of the Temple and those who died at Jonestown skewed older and African-American, Speier noted her specific concern over "adolescent girls" she spoke with at Jonestown, who spoke in "monosyllables…devoid of normal emotion" and showed no "interest in careers or college goals, expecting an early marriage within the cult to be their only option in life." She continued to speak with dismay about the twelve people from Ryan's district who had joined the Temple, all of whom were "white, came from families with above average income, and all were previously members of established churches."[316] She rounded out her testimony with the troubling accusation that PT, as well as many other "cults" were using the money often hoarded as a result of their tax-exempt status to stockpile weapons. If, as Speier claimed, these weapons were kept "only remotely" for the purpose of self-defense, what else might groups like the Hare Krishnas be planning?

1977, beating incumbent John Tunney who had faced a close race with the former New Left leader Tom Hayden in the Democratic primary.

[316] Dole meeting transcript, 26.

The next witness was another political insider, Bob Boettcher, the former head staffer of the Fraser subcommittee which had in 1977 investigated the Unification Church. Suddenly, the meeting was no longer about Jonestown and what had happened to Jackie Speier and others in Guyana. Boettcher laid out crimes and offenses committed by Moon which no reasonable person could defend on grounds of religious freedom, before stating: "[Moon's] stated goal, quite simply, is to rule the world by setting up a global theocracy in which separation between church and state will be abolished."[317] Boettcher continued on making incendiary statements about the activities of Moon and his "brainwashed servants," including that they were smuggling weapons and money into the country, infiltrating congressional offices as interns, and generally using deception and fraud to carry out Moon's evil designs. Boettcher agreed with Speier and others that to recognize the UC as a religious group was to make a mockery of religion itself: "To say these activities are protected by the First Amendment would be a travesty. They are activities of a thoroughly antidemocratic, brain-washed political party." Boettcher used the same tactic used by the UC against Peoples Temple against Moon's followers themselves, by drawing a hard line between a legitimate religious organization and an unhinged and anti-American political movement. Juxtaposing Boettcher and Speier created an implied comparison between the UC and PT. By beginning with one government official speaking of the horrors of Jonestown and cults in general, then following up her testimony with another government employee railing on the specific threat posed by the Moon organization, Dole seemed to confirm the anti-UC goals of the day.

Dole also invited those with expertise in the psychological elements of cult recruitment in an attempt to infuse the meeting with clinical language in addition to the bulk of highly emotional testimony. In reality, their testimony was equally terrifying and relied on tropes of brainwashing and sudden personality change that had been popular since the advent of the Korean War in the 1950s. Conway and Siegelman, the social scientists who had interviewed Ted Patrick for *Playboy,* talked about "sudden" personality change and framed the cult issue not as one of religious liberty or personal choice but in the language of a mental health "epidemic." They ended by endorsing deprogramming as the "only remedy," which in effect put them in the company of the more extreme wing of the ACM. They went a step further, saying the deprogramming was not only acceptable in extreme cases but that "we believe that deprogramming should be recognized as a new and valuable form of mental health therapy."[318] John G. Clark, a Harvard-affiliated psychiatrist and frequent testifier to the dangers of cults, likewise singled out sudden personality change as a result of cult conversion the primary issue. Recruitment tactics commonly deployed by NRMs produced "armies of willing, superbly controlled soldiers who would not only kill their parents or themselves, but are ready to act against anyone."[319] Clark emphasized the alienation of the parent-child relationships: cults rendered people unintelligible (and dangerous) to those closest to them, and who knew them the best. Such parents have a distinct sense that their "offspring had been maimed" through techniques of cultic mind control.[320]

Ted Patrick and Maurice Davis offered some of the most colorful testimony, focusing on the violence of cults and the dangers they posed to young people and families. Deprogrammer Patrick delivered an impassioned critique of cults as well as an adamant defense of the

[317] Dole meeting transcript, 31.
[318] Dole meeting transcript, 50.
[319] Dole meeting transcript, 43.
[320] Dole meeting transcript, 41.

controversial deprogramming method. Again Patrick reinforced the link between the survival of American families and the nation itself. Since he became involved in anticult work in the early 1970s, he'd been moved by the stories of many "husband, wife, mothers, and father (sic) who had lost their relatives in a cult." But the wellbeing of good families was not the only thing at stake. Extreme methods were necessary, he claimed, in the face of "one of the most dangerous and vicious wars in the history of mankind," characterized by "psychological warfare."[321] This was no mere earthly war, however, as Patrick told the audience that "cult members have been brain-washed that their mind is of the devil; the mind is evil; thinking is the machinery of the devil."[322] For Patrick, and many other members of the ACM, this crisis was existential, on par with Nazism or Communism as a global threat. Patrick put it bluntly: "I feel there is a conspiracy to turn this country into a totalitarian nation."[323]

Patrick had made clear his lack of faith in government to effectively address the cult problem, as well as his sense of the most dangerous cult in America, in the lengthy and serendipitously timed interview with *Playboy Magazine* in 1978. Patrick was being interviewed by two other Dole meeting witnesses, authors Jim Siegelman and Flo Conway, in early November of 1978. Twelve days after the interview was completed, Americans learned of the horrors at Jonestown. The published interview thus is spliced together from before and after Jonestown, giving an in-the-moment reaction from the nation's most infamous cult fighter. Though he was once a government official, like many Americans in 1978 Patrick came to see the government as totally ineffective at best, actively corrupt at worst. He had petitioned everyone from local officials to the president since he began his work as a deprogrammer in the early 1970s with no luck. As many anticultists in the 1970s would agree, the Moonies were "public enemy number one," both for their recruitment tactics and their vast wealth and influence. Politicians were too afraid of the cults because they "can buy anybody and everything."[324] Ruth Carter Stapleton, the President's sister, was one of the "biggest cult leaders in the country."[325] Thus, any claim that the government was trying to hold them accountable was questionable, and the Fraser subcommittee was little more than a corrupt and toothless bid for PR. When Conway and Siegelman pushed back on these charges, saying that Stapleton had used any cult-y techniques in a benevolent way, Patrick shot back by pointing out that Jim Jones himself had been "the TV type of cult leader, visible and wise to the media."[326] Respectability was no insurance against evil, and one of these people being well connected to those in politics did not make them benign, but rather was the very source of their nefarious power.

Rabbi Maurice Davis had less to say about the current administration, but made even more explicit the connections between antidemocratic systems and the cults. He began his statement in dramatic fashion: "Ladies and gentlemen, every path leads somewhere. That is what a path is all about. The path of segregation leads to lynching every time. The path of antisemitism leads to Auschwitz every time. The path of the cults leads to Jonestowns and we watch it at our peril."[327] Davis dismissed any sense that the UC or other NRMs were religious, and instead evoked the ultimate sin of violating a child's bodily autonomy. Davis was not "here to protest against religion, or against religions. I am here to protest against child molesters, for as

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[321] Dole meeting transcript, 63
[322] Dole meeting transcript, 65.
[323] Dole meeting transcript, 63.
[324] Florence Conway and Jim Siegelman, Interview with Ted Patrick, *Playboy Magazine*, March 1979, 84.
[325] Patrick, 1979 Playboy Interview, 220.
[326] Patrick, 1979 Playboy Interview, 90.
[327] Dole meeting transcript, 78.

surely as there are those who lure children with lollypops in order to rape their bodies, so, too, are there those who lure children with candy-coated lies in order to rape their minds."[328] Most of the "children" who joined NRMs were in reality young adults whose choices worried their parents. Davis and others stoked public fears of child molestation without real evidence of widespread sexual abuse.[329] This kind of testimony placed these debates squarely in the purview of family values, and acted as a disturbing precursor of the rhetoric in the 1980s around Satanic Ritual Abuse. Thus these kinds of statements did not just add melodrama, but did real harm by convincing the public that real children were being sexually abused and tormented by depraved cults writ large. Even more disturbing was the fact that over three hundred children had died at Jonestown, so claims of abuse in general would have felt especially convincing to those already primed to believe in widespread cultic sexual and physical child abuse.

In contrast to Davis and Patrick, the congressmen present took pains to paint themselves as curious, concerned, and neutral students of the cult issue, but the transcripts suggest that Dole made his general sympathy to the ACM clear. Everyone knew that Ted Patrick was a highly controversial choice to speak, and Dole was aware that to endorse Patrick too strongly would be an optical mistake. Before Siegelman, Conway, and Clark spoke, however, Dole noted how very "enlightening" he had found the three of them on a television program and how he hoped they might be as insightful in their testimony.[330] Rabbi Davis, who used as violent language as anyone else, received a special introduction by his own representative, Rep. Ottinger, who made sure to "take the opportunity to welcome a distinguished constituent."[331] In contrast to the warm welcome he was given by the congressmen who had convened the meeting, Davis's testimony provoked jeers and emotional dissent from the members of the audience, most of whom were members or allies of the Unification Church. Indeed, the meeting's transcript is peppered with notes about "applause" as well as heckling from the audience, as Senator Dole repeatedly told them to temper their reactions in the interest of time.

The two representatives from the ACLU turned the anticult accusations of antidemocratic violations on their head, suggesting that it was those who would persecute minority religions who were guilty of betraying America's cherished cultural and legal norms. Veteran civil liberties attorney Jeremiah Gutman and the National Council of Churches' Director for Civil and Religious Liberties, Dean Kelley, received cheers from the audience, but no warm welcome from Dole or other representatives. Each questioned the idea that small religions were any more likely to commit crimes than other groups or individuals, and also posited that the actual threat to individual freedoms were the more zealous anticultists. Both speakers agreed that no one should

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[328] Dole meeting transcript, 79.

[329] As Megan Goodwin and others have pointed out, moral panics about strangers sexually abusing children are commonly directed toward minority religions. This is unfair, and also harmful to efforts to solve the endemic problem of child abuse, which is in fact much more likely to occur at the hands of trusted adults like coaches, family members, and others, rather than as part of an evil plot by fringe religious adherents. See Goodwin, *Abusing Religion*, 3.

[330] Dole meeting transcript, 45. Beyond this specific meeting, psychologists and psychiatrists played a critical role in bolstering accusations of brainwashing and the dangers of cults. Some of the most influential include Margaret Thaler singer, an important witness in many brainwashing cases and the author of the seminal book *Cults In Our Midst: The Hidden Menace in Our Everyday Lives* (Jossey-Bass, 1995) and Philip Zimbardo of the Stanford Prison experiment fame. Zimbardo's work on power, coercion, and mind control lent itself to an interest in NRMs, and he wrote much on the topic over the course of decades. He also conducted a study entitled "Cults Go To High School" which focused on the incidence of NRM recruitment in high schools. Today, experts have questioned how often high schoolers were proselytized on school grounds, but studies like Zimbardo's as well as books like Singer's undoubtedly helped promote the idea that NRMs constituted a persistent threat to the mental wellbeing of many, including minors.

[331] Dole meeting transcript, 74.

be permitted to break the law because they claimed religious beliefs, but also that the standard for investigating crimes perpetrated by minority religions should be the same as for any other group or individual. Gutman in particular turned his attention to Richard Delgado (prominent anticult law professor), Patrick, and others. For the NRM allies, the truly un-American act was not participation in unfamiliar religions, but deprogramming and other methods suggested by the anticult activists to remove members. Government-compelled psychiatric treatment, conservatorships granted to parents of adult children, and forced abductions: this was the stuff of totalitarian nightmares. Such tactics constituted "precisely that kind of operation going on in the Soviet Union today which is one of the most vicious and reprehensible invasions of personal liberty which we all are aware of and object to."[332] Two other speakers testified on behalf of the NRMs and warned against witch-hunts and persecution, bringing the "pro" NRM speakers to four and those sympathetic to the anticultists to twelve.

The most controversial advocate for NRM rights, and the most formidable opponent of the meeting, spoke last. Chairman Dole permitted Neil Salonen, president of the UC, to deliver some brief remarks he had prepared. The remarks were predictable and scathing. Salonen claimed that the meeting was targeted at the Unification Church from the start and that only the alliance of dedicated church members, other friends of religious freedom, and God's will allowed the meeting to go on in its slightly improved but still "unacceptable" present state. The issue was not "real members of the Unification Church" who did "not fear persecution or deprogramming."[333] Salonen continued: "Like the early Christians, our faith has given us the strength to withstand public ridicule, discrimination, or even government harassment." Since the events at Jonestown, the UC had deployed this comparison and successfully cast themselves as victims of a hysterical witch-hunt. The church's successful quest to reserve Salonen a slot in the crowded roster for the Dole meeting showed the effectiveness of the pressure campaign they mounted with only about a week of notice before the hearing. Salonen promised that the church would not tolerate being victimized by the government, and that they would "vigorously defend" themselves. He made good on that promise.[334]

Reporting on the meeting was split. One *Washington Post* article referred to the meeting as "noisy" and "tense," while another noted the hundreds of UC members who swarmed the Russell Building with signs that read "Repeal the First Amendment! Dole for President!"[335] Other opponents of the meeting came to protest as well, bolstering the UC's claim that the matter at hand was one of the religious liberty. In an interview with another *Washington Post* reporter, Salonen admitted that they purposely made a scene and hoped to draw attention to themselves as the target of Dole's ire. Salonen explained that during the first meeting Dole held in 1976 with concerned parents of UC members, "we got kicked in the gut on national TV. We had to mobilize today or else there was going to be another slash on the nightly news."[336] Nor were Dole's personal political goals lost on other observers—one scathing piece in the *New Republic* argued that Dole, seeking fodder for his 1980 presidential run, made a fateful error in assuming that he was "riding a wave of public opinion" when he decided to convene the meeting.[337] In fact, his own witnesses were a "singularly unappetizing group" which left UC president Salonen

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[332] Dole meeting transcript, 73.
[333] Dole meeting transcript, 122.
[334] Dole meeting transcript, 124.
[335] Marjorie Hyer, "Cults Hearing Noisy, Tense," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 1979.
[336] T.R. Reid, "Public Relations a Factor As Sen. Dole Opens Session," *The Washington Post*, February 6, 1979.
[337] Steven Chapman, "On the Hill: Cult-Mongering," *The New Republic,* February 17, 1979.

as the voice of reason. By the end of Salonen's remarks, "it was obvious that Dole's plan had backfired. Instead of twisted zealots, the Moonies looked like martyrs; instead of the defender of America's young, Dole came off an un-Grand Inquisitor."

While Dole was careful in his language about the event, he did not abandon ship because of controversy around the meeting. He had softened slightly: the hearing was now a "meeting;" the aims were purely educational, not investigative. Dole in boilerplate follow-up letters sent in response to supportive mail following the meeting avoided even using the word cult, opting instead for "'so-called" new religious groups.'"[338] While Dole and his colleagues may have been careful to gloss over any implications of persecution at the meeting itself, the senator stuck to his guns even in the face of criticism in its wake. In an interview given to Canadian outlet *MacClean's*, Dole doubled down on his position that the cults posed a threat, reminding those who suggested he was piggybacking off concerns post-Jonestown that "I have a track record." He was not using the issue as a publicity vehicle, nor to bolster his presidential ambitions, as the "Moonies" implied—"that's just nonsense."[339] Dole's office continued to receive mail in response to the meeting for weeks, most of it positive. While Dole was careful not to agree with or use strong vitriolic language against NRMs in his correspondence with constituents, he appreciated the support.

Lacking traction at the federal level, activists turned to state and local governments where legislators attempted to pass bills to curb cult recruitment activity. As in broader debates about the role of government and religion in the public sphere, schools and the ability of parents to protect their children, as well as the duty of citizens to protect "families" in general, played an important role in these efforts. The most controversial law around NRM recruitment was a "mental hygiene" law passed the State Assembly of New York in 1979. Widely known as the Lasher Amendment, the statute would have made it possible for courts to grant families conservatorships over adult relatives should they undergo sudden personality changes as a result of joining a religious group. The debates during the August hearings for this amendment mirrored many of the same themes of the Dole meeting. Because an actual piece of legislation was under debate, much of the discussion was less about theory and more about the actual role of the legislature in regulating the cults. Witnesses included politicians, defectors from the Unification Church, a representative of the church itself, representatives from other religions, a lawyer from the NYCLU, and others.

This hearing also shared with Dole's February meeting a fixation on the dangers posed to children by these groups, as well as minority religion's right to the free practice of their chosen religions. The Unification Church was, as it had been in February, at the center of the controversy. Bernard Livingston, the president of an organization called Save Our Families, explicitly linked the aims of the Unification Church to the destruction of both families and the American system:

> There is very little difference between this Fascist right, the Unification Church and Communism…that's what the Unification cult goal is, the destruction of the nuclear family, the destruction of pat tradition (sic), the annihilation of individuality. Absolute

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[338] No author, letter to supporters of cult phenomenon meeting, February 23, 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 362, folder 3, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[339] No author, "Straightening out the mind-benders," *Maclean's*, February 19, 1979, 28.

> obedience to the point of suicide if necessary. The destruction of our democratic way of life and the rapid development of an army of mindless robots who will work for nothing and die for Moon, which, believe me, is dying for nothing.[340]

This language deployed a common tactic of the culture wars—that threats to "traditional" families were threats to the nation as a whole while invoking fears of communism, which still constituted a powerful specter as the 1970s came to a close. Other speakers also discussed schools, another fierce battleground of the culture wars, as sites of potential corruption and proselytization. One rabbi, Larry Gevirtz, testified that cult recruiters were infiltrating high school athletic programs in order to convert teenagers.[341] No evidence of this practice exists, but the ACM commonly claimed that schools, especially public rather than religious schools, were critical sites of such recruitment.

Jonestown loomed large during this hearing in the summer of 1979. W. Farley Jones, an administrative director of the Unification Church, used this venue to once again distinguish his movement from Peoples Temple on political as well as religious grounds. He carefully insisted that Jones and his people were wrong not for being believers or members of a small sect, but for the contents of their beliefs:

> The Jonestown Peoples Temple was not a religion. Rather it was a Marxist Commune with roots in the philosophy derived from materialism. As you are well aware, the materialist biology places little value on human life inevitable…Witness what's happening in Vietnam and has happened in Cambodia. It was these conditions that made a mass suicide possible. By contrast, the Unification Church Community is centered in God, the God of truth and love.[342]

Jones emphasized the conservative nature of the beliefs and style of the Unification Church, attempting to distance them from the image presented in the testimony of a former member, Christopher Edwards. Edwards spoke to the "false advertising" that lured him into the Berkeley, California church, a practice known as "heavenly deception."[343] Jones noted that this practice was not done nationally, and was only developed as a common practice among the Oakland Family because in reality the church was too square, too normal, too churchy for the young people they had hoped to reach in the progressive Bay Area. This testimony speaks to a larger project in which the UC attempted to portray itself as conservative, Christian, and traditional in contrast to the countercultural and politically radical NRMs with whom they might be grouped. Ultimately, the Lasher Amendment passed in the assembly but was vetoed by the governor. A victory for NRMs legally, the death of the Lasher Amendment did not signal the end of the controversy over religious minorities.

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[340] Transcript from *The Assembly of the State of New York Public Hearing on the Treatment of Children by Cults,* August 18-19, 1979, Part II, page 79. Reprinted by the American Family Foundation (Lexington: Mass.)
[341] NY State hearing transcript, pt. I, 111-112.
[342] NY State hearing transcript, pt. II, 4-5.
[343] In chapter 1, I discussed the fact that often UC converts would not be told about Reverend Moon for several weeks, and thus would join for a variety of spiritual, social, and political reasons. This practice was especially common in the Oakland Family or Bay Area branch of the church.

Efforts also halted at the federal level, but Dole felt that his February meeting was successful enough that he began to plan another for the following summer. Dole's office received a deluge of mail about this meeting from concerned constituents, the director of the ACLU, and others. One report stated that the his first meeting seemed to be a failure, as ten weeks later there had been no movement because of Dole's congressional colleagues had no desire to "open that can of worms," but Dole wasn't willing to give up so easily.[344] His office proposed a second meeting specifically to look into crimes committed by NRMs as well as the issue of tax-exemption status.[345] This time, the experts would not be drawn from the ranks of the anticult movement, but rather government experts testifying to the law. The second meeting, then, would be focused on the law and regulatory structure itself as opposed to NRMs. This approach might have felt right to Dole, who had explored various legal avenues in 1976 when he first attempted to work with government agencies to look into the Unification Church.

These hearings, and subsequent questions about the government's role in regulating religion, were proposed and took place in the context of longer, fierce debates about the separation between church and state. In the thirty years before Jonestown, the Supreme Court had "advanced a separationist doctrine" regarding the role of religion in public spaces.[346] Schools occupied a special place in these rulings, as they sat at the nexus of religion, the treatment of children, and the role of the state in dictating public norms. Dole expressed his opposition to bans on prayer in schools, issuing a press release after President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1967 declared July 30 to be a national day of prayer. Dole criticized the President's hypocrisy in promoting prayer while not supporting bills which would have allowed voluntary prayers in public school, which had been banned since the 1962 *Engle v. Vitale* case. Noting his "fervent" belief that "our nation was founded on Judeo-Christian principles" Dole insisted that was "of utmost importance that our children be reminded of these principles in our schools as well as in our homes."[347] Indeed, he believed that broader cultural and social decline could be attributed to an absence of such moral teachings: "Perhaps the moral environment of laxness and disdain for authority, the very climate that has encouraged the riots the President asked the nation to pray to prevent, would not exist if these principles were recognized in our schools."[348] The doctrine of separation, especially in public schools, continued into the 1970s as the *Lemon v. Kurtzman* case established a test to ensure the non-violation of the establishment clause of the first amendment and promote an even stronger separation of church and state.

By the Carter administration, related issues of taxation, schools, and religion helped bring together Catholics, evangelicals, and other religious voters who wanted more, not less, religion

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[344] Korns, "Cults in America and Public Policy," Congressional Quarterly, April 13, 1979.

[345] According to UC member and historian Michael Mickler, Dole's efforts to hound the church's tax-exempt status failed on the federal level when the IRS found no violations, but had some impact on the local level as New York City barred them from exemption since 1977. This decision would be overturned in 1982. See Michael Mickler, "No Strangers to Litigation: Court Cases Involving the Unification Church/Family Federation in the United States" in Eileen Barker and James T. Richardson, eds., *Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions* (London: Routledge, 2020), https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003053590.

[346] Frank Lambert, *Religion in American Politics: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 143.

[347] Press Release, "Prayer or Politics?", August 1 1967, Digitized Press Releases Collection, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[348] Dole was referring here to the Detroit Riots of 1967, a conflict between African-American residents and the city's police force. In *Black Against Empire*, Martin and Bloom called it the "largest urban rebellion in the United States in the twentieth century" (p. 86) and cite it as a critical turning point in the Black freedom struggle. Or can have a see more pages 86-91.

in the public sphere, and less government in their religion. Conservatives weaponized the Democrats' separationist doctrine popular with liberals against Carter, who had won 75% of evangelicals as a Democrat in 1976. Carter, a devout evangelical, tried hard to balance his own faith, his belief in the centrality of church-state separation, and the increasingly secular leanings of the Democratic party. In one 1976 briefing on education, for instance, Carter held firm in his support of the Supreme Court's decision to withhold aid from parochial schools but also emphasized that parents should be able to choose alternatives to public schools.[349] This stance, among others including his controversial hands-off position on abortion, angered many Catholics as well as Protestants and allowed for the Republican Party to draw a more effective wedge between conservative Christian voters and the Democrats.

As such, protest against religious taxation was, according to historian Rick Perlstein, "the most powerful organizing discontent" for the New Right.[350] Activists mobilized not only around the denial of aid, but the government's use of taxation as a means of enforcing civil rights and other mandates. The most famous legal case in this fight centered on the segregated Christian college Bob Jones University, which made it to the Supreme Court in 1983. BJU had lost its exempt status in 1971 upon refusing to integrate its student body and then banning interracial dating. While the case would not reach the Supreme Court until the Reagan years, it was already well known as it worked its way through the courts in the 1970s. This case as well as a rash of other more local examples infuriated Christians and stoked both their antigovernment sentiments and their politicization.

Dole's proposed tactic of using the IRS as a tool against the so-called cults by undoing their tax exempt status thus ran afoul of the rising tide in his own party. Dole might have hoped to weaponize the cult issue to position himself as a defender of the family and Christian values, but in the end his method was too risky. The protections afforded by the First Amendment meant that Dole and others who wished to counter the spread of the "pseudo-religions" needed to first establish what was and was not a legitimate religion. To use the tax system to do this smacked to strongly of government infringement on religious freedom for both more liberal groups like the ACLU, whose interest was in protecting free religious expression for all Americans, and for conservative Christians who might have shared Dole's instinct to limit the influence of fringe religions and the counterculture, but for whom actual government involvement was too high a price to pay.

The political will, in the end, was lacking to pass legislation against NRMs. Dole never held his second planned meeting, and Carter stood firm in his insistence that no action would be taken against NRMs at the federal level. Pressure from religious communities broadly killed any traction the ACM felt in the wake of Jonestown. The Dole meeting represented the last time the federal government showed real interest in "cults" per se, though in the 1990s the violent confrontation between the government and the Branch Davidian group in Waco, Texas would prompt a substantial congressional investigation.

Dole's cultfighting adventures did not provide an obvious boost to his 1980 presidential hopes, which ended abruptly after he finished fifth in the New Hampshire primary. That election was, of course, won by Ronald Reagan, who garnered 75% of the evangelical vote against his

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[349] Andrew S. Moore, "'Jimmy Carter's "Catholic Problem"—Not to Mention His Protestant One': The Democratic Coalition and the Struggle over Religious Liberty in the Late 1970s," *Journal of Church & State* 53, no. 2 (March 2011).

[350] Rick Perlstein, *Reaganland: America's Right Turn 1976-1980,* (New York, NY: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, an imprint of Simon & Schuster, Inc., 2021), 484.

Democratic rival Jimmy Carter—the exact same proportion of evangelical Carter had won against Gerald Ford in 1976. Religion was a crucial issue, but cults themselves were not. Dole's efforts to look into the cult threat was notably bipartisan. In the 1980s, however, Christian activists would gain huge amounts of power, advocating for their own interests and that of other religious groups. Thus who counted as a "cult" and who could make a claim to be a legitimate religious organization remained an important question. None of the solutions Dole and others advocated for to stem what they perceived as the cult threat really made an impact. While the events at Jonestown definitely deterred some from joining groups, and many small groups died out in the 1980s, the government's opportunity to take on the cults passed. The public relations campaign that began after Jonestown did help the Unification Church ascend to tremendous heights of power and influence in the GOP and American politics more broadly. By the mid-1980s, when Dole would get his 1970s wish and Reverend Moon went to prison for tax evasion, it became a religious freedom cause célèbre with Jerry Falwell and other Christian advocates arguing for Moon as the scapegoat of a system hostile to religions in general.

Chapter 5:
Destructive Cults and Unpopular Churches: the Cult(ure) Wars of the 1980s

In 1984, the media began reporting that teachers at the McMartin Preschool in Southern California had been abusing hundreds of its pupils for years. Allegedly the perpetrators physically and sexually tortured their students while wearing robes and practicing rituals involving pentagrams, altars, and other hallmarks of the occult. The McMartin preschool case widely popularized the notion that Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) ran rampant, and that no child was safe from its perverse, evil practitioners. After six years—the longest criminal trial in American history at that point—a judge in Los Angeles rejected all charges. The prosecution could produce no compelling evidence that the defendants, Peggy McMartin and her son Raymond Buckey, had ever abused children at the school. Subsequent investigations of other teachers, neighbors, coaches, and parents would follow, as well as an avalanche of television specials and magazine exposés alleging widespread SRA. In spite of the widespread publicity and active involvement of law enforcement around Satanism and child abuse, it is now clear that these groups simply never existed. Many lives were ruined, and many tax dollars wasted, over these investigations. The moral panic around SRA and Satanism more broadly—known as the Satanic Panic—took on the same rhetoric as the cult scare of the 1970s. Ideas about brainwashing, as well as concern over the welfare of America and its children in the face of unfamiliar religions, permeated both. The Satanic Panic had a specifically Christian bent, as fundamentalists believed and amplified the idea that evil pervaded American society and proved increasingly threatening to the physical and spiritual safety of children. This was cult wars as culture wars: as conservative Christians gained influence in the public sphere, they deployed the central ideas of the cult wars in order to promote conservative sexual, religious, and political mores and narrowly circumscribe which religious groups and individuals could be accepted as legitimate.

The cult wars had always been political, but by the 1980s they had become partisan. The Unification Church benefitted from and indeed helped pave the way for a landscape which favored the autonomy of politically conservative churches. This narrowing of acceptable religion along partisan lines created an opening for the Unification Church to successfully make claims to church-hood and to become a partisan on the conservative side of the culture wars. The UC had strived in the 1960s to fit into the countercultural ethos of the Bay Area as it competed in the spiritual marketplace with a host of other religious and political movements. After Jonestown, it tried to shirk this tainted association with fringe NRMs, and instead portrayed itself as an embattled but ultimately traditional small new church. Rather than obscuring its conservative anticommunist and sexual politics in the language of 1960s youth culture, in the 1980s it proudly promoted shared causes with the ascendent religious right. Reverend Moon's prison sentence, which he served for 1985, was not a victory for pro-family religious traditionalism, as Bob Dole had envisioned in the 1970s. Rather, Moon became a martyr for religious persecution, as Jerry Falwell and other leaders of the Christian Right saw his imprisonment and release as an occasion to rail against unjust taxation and government interference into religious affairs. Just as the definition of the family became increasingly the territory of religious conservatives, so too did the definition of what was a dangerous cult. Attention thus shifted away from groups that more so resembled churches—and whose regulation could threaten so-called legitimate church groups as well—and toward a more diffuse sense of the occult, the ungodly, and the unorthodox. A group like the UC, with shared goals, massive resources, and a strong investment in fitting

certain models of American religion, could successfully join the ranks of acceptable churches that were becoming increasingly central to Republican (and national) politics.

Jonestown, and reactions to it, altered the ways Americans thought about the relationship between non-normative religious beliefs and practices and their potential for violence. This association of unorthodox religious practice with death and destruction combined with an increasingly visible public Christian discourse, and disseminated the idea that evil, and Satanic forces, were at work in an increasingly secular American society. In the 1980s, the anticult activism itself became more Christian, as conservative activists took up the issue of Satanism and the occult as a proxy for anxieties around the destruction of American values generally. This contributed directly to various elements of the culture wars—such as battles over the role of Christianity in public life and the responsibility of parents to censor the popular culture their children consumed.

Jonestown changed the stakes and terms of both the cult wars and the culture wars by promoting the idea that cults were violent and destructive. In the 1970s, legal cases and media coverage of groups like the Unification Church or the Hare Krishnas emphasized that these groups were manipulative, exploitative, and potentially harmful to those within them. By the 1980s, politicians, law enforcement officials, parents, and others argued that death and destruction were not byproducts, but the primary intents of "cults." Ultimately, Jonestown solidified a broader cultural connection between NRMs and violence, and acted as a shorthand which allowed those in favor of regulation or surveillance of NRMs to distinguish between authentic religions and cults, with violence and malice being hallmarks of the latter. This is, in part, why the Satanic Panic was able to flourish: the idea that Satanists (and other practitioners of non-Christian religion) posed a danger relied on the belief, ostensibly proven at Jonestown, that cults were capable of committing untold horrors against themselves and others.

In this moment, the cult wars helped produce a culture wars logic: emphasizing the violent potential of transgressive (and progressive) beliefs provided a way to talk about the destructive potential of a host of cultural phenomenon, from heavy metal to meditation. Concerned parents, politicians, and other observers emphasized the special corrosive powers of these influences on children and families, thus bolstering a narrow, conservative conception of the family itself as well as what was appropriate within the home. Peoples Temple's association with utopian countercultural values, California, and left/liberal politics had dire consequences for non-Christian NRMs, who conservatives and the ACM could now more readily paint with a broad brush and portray as deviant, transgressive, and violent. That the Christian anticult movement in the 1980s began to take a special interest in the New Age represented an anticult expression of the culture wars. The New Age, with its associations with California, progressive mores, and transgressive, alternative aesthetic and beliefs, sat at the intersection of the counterculture and the occult. On top of its associations with the counterculture, the New Age bothered some Christian observers because of its ubiquity and ability to permeate the home. One did not have to attend shadowy ceremonies or formal orders to be a New Ager, though some people believed in such underground conspiracies. It was clear to critics that in the form of the New Age, the dregs of 1960s counterculture continued to contaminate mainstream culture. This included sites like the boardrooms where companies experimented with est tactics,[351] in homes

[351] est, which stands for Erhard Seminar Trainings, began in 1971 by Werner Erhard, was a popular seminar/training organization based on principles of personal transformation. est was not a religion or a church but is often lumped in with NRMs or considered a psychotherapy cult.

where suburban moms dabbled in the power of healing crystals, and schools where activists fought to ban practices like Transcendental Meditation.[352]

The cult wars had raised questions of what counted as a legitimate family and a legitimate religion back in the mid-1970s: by the 1980s, narrow and conservative responses became increasingly dominant. By 1979, conservatives denounced nontraditional family arrangements and advocated for a narrower definition of family that excluded conceptions of family promulgated by many NRMs. This demonstrates on critical juncture of the cult war and culture wars, as newly vocal Christian culture warriors took up causes like the New Age and Satanism as their version of fighting the incursion of cults. Thus debates about how to deal with cults—in the media, in government, in private life—took on a Christian bent. Christian activists and politicians were not just worried about cults, but the occult, and its potential to invade the home through popular music and culture. Bob Dole's means of curbing the Unification Church and responding to concerns about cults no longer made sense in the 1980s, as his party embraced a variety of churches while rejecting fringe beliefs and movements beyond the Abrahamic pale. As the Satanic Panic reached a fever pitch, many of the same religious leaders at its helm spent considerable time coming to Reverend Moon's defense. Moon's status as a martyr of religious freedom upon his release from prison in 1985 for tax fraud, as well as his group's commitment to and generous funding of conservative causes, took his movement to heights within the GOP that would have been unthinkable before Jonestown, which changed everything.

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Jonestown cast a pall over NRMs in general, and justified increased scrutiny into their unorthodox family arrangements and religious beliefs. Media fascination with weddings and marriage in NRMs, as well as the memory of Jonestown, created an irresistible spectacle on December 28, 1982, when two followers of the Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh, a spiritual leader originally from India, were married at their guru's compound in Antelope, Oregon. The nuptials of Shannon Jo Ryan, AKA Ma Prem Amrita Pritam, was reported by the New York Times as national news—many found it hard to believe that the eldest daughter of slain congressman Leo Ryan, the highest profile casualty of the Jonestown tragedy, had chosen to join what many Americans viewed as a cult. While Ryan and others associated with the Bhagwan were unequivocal in their stance that the group bore little resemblance to Peoples Temple, her father's death loomed large at the marriage ceremony. Ma Anand Sheela, the right hand of the Bhagwan, officiated the ceremony. "We're here," she said, "to forget the tragedy." There were other references to the events at Guyana too, most strikingly one printed label on a champagne bottle which read "[w]ith Bhagwan, even Kool-Aid becomes champagne."[353] A year before, Shannon Jo's echoed the notion that the Bhagwan offered not more dangerous religious snake oil but instead something good and pure. In a widely quoted interview with the *Los Angeles Times*, she addressed the question of guru-directed murder/suicide head-on:

> I've heard other people say if Bhagwan asked them to kill themselves, they would do it…If Bhagwan asked them to kill someone else, they would do it. I don't

[352] In 1977, courts in New Jersey ruled that the teaching of Transcendental Meditation (TM) in public schools violated the establishment clause of the First Amendment and thus the separation of church and state. The practice was invented by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi in the 1950s and gained popularity in the West in the 1960s and 1970s after its promotion by celebrities, including the Beatles, who traveled to India to practice with Yogi.

[353] AP [no author], "Daughter of Rep. Ryan Married at Guru's Ranch," *The New York Times*, December 28, 1982.

> know if my trust in him is that total. I would like it to be, and I don't believe he would ever do that.[354]

At multiple points in the *Times* interview, Ryan insisted that her guru shared little in common with Jim Jones. Where Jones's mission had been driven by his need to control followers, the Bhagwan offered instead "total freedom…Bhagwan is trying to give people control of themselves." Shannon did not see her involvement with the group as parallel to that of Jones's followers; further, she saw her actions as a tribute to her late father's legacy. Congressman Ryan, she explained, was always doing things that were viewed as dangerous and controversial. Her choice to "be who I am in spite of controversy" was her way to honor her father's life.

Although exceptional in her proximity to the most infamous event in the history of "cults" as most Americans understood the phenomenon, Shannon Jo's own narrative of her involvement with the Rajneeshees echoed many other young people's stories. A traumatic car accident had caused her to question the meaning of her life, and in the ensuing years she dabbled in various forms of spiritual healing and enlightenment. She continued to feel a sense of alienation, as though society's expectations of her "just didn't fit." She felt skeptical at first when a friend from Berkeley introduced her to the teachings of the Bhagwan, especially after what happened to her father. Shannon Jo decided to set aside her hesitations and travel to a retreat in Poona, India. This experience changed her life, and she decided to follow the guru. She stressed in the interview that she felt free to leave at any time, and that the group offered her freedom, not a lack thereof. Her group, she reiterated, was not at risk of the kind of mass tragedy that resulted in her father's death: "I just don't believe that what happened there would ever happen with Bhagwan. It's not a cult. It depends on your definition of a cult, but to me a cult is something that controls your mind and kind of ruins your life…I think there are some cults that are really destructive of people. What I saw in Poona was not destructive for anybody." Per convention in narratives about young Americans' conversion to NRMs, the *Times* article noted the fear and "misgivings" of Shannon Jo's mother, Margaret, with regard to her daughter's chosen religion and decision to return to Poona when she had the funds. Shannon Jo insisted, however, that ultimately her mother trusted her not to "do anything stupid," and doubled down on the distinction between the Rajneeshees and Peoples Temple.

Shannon Jo/Pritam's conversion was national news. Her famous father made her conversion symbolic of parents and children coping with discord around NRM membership. In an interview with *People* magazine in February, 1981, the issue of family was front and center. *People* spoke to Margaret Ryan, also known as Peg, about her feelings for her daughter's life choices. The article painted a portrait of a mother concerned but ultimately approving, more concerned about her daughter's flightiness than her involvement with the Bhagwan, per se: "Some of what [Shannon Jo] says makes sense, some is far out. But she's 29, not a teenager anymore—and it concerns me that she has no clear idea of what kind of career she wants."[355] Peg's worry for her daughter's lack of a clear path in society echoes the feelings of many other parents whose children had joined NRMs: even those not concerned for their kids' immediate physical, psychological, or spiritual wellbeing often expressed misgivings about their choices to abandon trajectories that their families and society had envisioned for them.

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[354] William Endicott and *Los Angeles Times*, "Leo Ryan's Daughter Joins Cult," *Washington Post*, January 12, 1981.
[355] Richard K. Rein, "The Daughter of Jonestown Victim Leo Ryan Argues That Her Guru's Sect Is Not A Cult," *People Magazine,* February 16, 1981.

While conservative in their attitudes about sex and marriage, the Unification Church attracted a great deal of attention for its unorthodox marriage customs. The UC's spectacular mass weddings also made it the subject of media fascination. In July of 1982, for instance, the UC made headlines for marrying 4,184 couples at New York City's Madison Square Garden in the largest mass wedding in history, according to UC publicity. A *Washington Post* article about the affair emphasized the spectacle, for instance the 2000+ women in identical wedding dresses, preparing to wed men they met only days before the nuptials. Disgruntled parents sat in the audience, with one mother asking "why does the government allow this?"[356] In fact, marriage was a central tenet of UC philosophy. According to their main religious text, *the Divine Principle*, messiahship was a role to be filled by a man born to human parents but free of original sin. Reverend Moon met this standard, as did Jesus. Jesus, however, was killed before he could fulfill the rest of the prophecy, which was to establish the ideal family. This family would also be free from original sin, and eventually Moon's church could establish an ideal nation. According to Moon, his own children were of "unstained lineage," as were the children of couples whom he matched and blessed in marriage. This act of marriage and blessing freed Moon's followers of original sin and readied them to start their own ideal families. In theory, once everyone on earth participated, the world itself would be cleansed of sin, and "ideal" according to Moon's principle.[357] If these beliefs seem unconventional, they translated into a deeply conservative politics shared by many Americans. Moon's theology and notions about marriage centered on purity, and any deviation—be it bestiality, homosexuality, incest, pedophilia, etc.—violated and sullied the pure and perfect nature of love and marriage between a man and a woman. Ideas about marriage, as well as anticommunism, demonstrate how the unorthodox concepts that underlaid Unificationist beliefs ultimately translated to something understandable, embraceable, and shared by the mainstream Republican Party and conservatives more generally.

But NRM marriage and family practices remained controversial, especially for many conservatives. Some relatives of NRM members teamed up with Christian right activists to exclude NRMs from the legal definition of family. To them, alternative NRM family arrangements did not seem quirky or curious, but a matter of legal and personal urgency. Henrietta Crampton of Redondo Beach, California, lobbied officials all the way up to President Jimmy Carter about this issue. Her daughter Kathy Crampton had joined the Love Family, led by Paul Erdmann AKA Love Israel. The Seattle-based group had formed in 1968, and shared the utopian and love-centered vision of other countercultural religious movements that sprung up at the same time. The Love Family found many of its recruits among the hippie communities on the west coast. They promoted themselves as a community based in principles of sharing, sustainability, and a kind spirit of "adoption" toward other people. Accordig to their own literature, they wished to care for their own community and those around them, and to offer an alternative to an alienating and destructive consumer society.[358] Relatives like the Crampton family, however, painted a much more dire picture of life in the group, in which participants shed their birth names and abandoned their biological families in order to follow with absolute devotion the directives of Love Israel. Members were denied contact with their families, medical care, and were at all turns stripped of their individual identities which were subsumed under the needs of the group. Desperate to save their daughter, the Cramptons had enlisted the help of the

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[356] Joyce Wadler, "Moon's Marriage of the Masses," *The Washington Post*, July 2, 1982.
[357] Eileen Barker, *The Making of a Moonie*, 78–79.
[358] Love Family Pamphlet, ND, box 214, folder 9, Louis Jolyon West papers (Collection 590). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

infamous Ted Patrick, the father of deprogramming also known as "Black Lightning." Patrick even appeared alongside the Cramptons in an NBC news segment entitled "the psychology of cults," publicizing their plight as well as the cult issue more generally.[359]

Crampton first turned to Washington state officials for assistance. In April of 1979, she received a letter from Jack Allard, Chief of Public Health Laboratories and Epidemiology for state of Washington. Crampton had written Allard, asking his office to investigate the high incidence of hepatitis and other public health threats in the Love Family. She claimed they were using human feces as fertilizer and then giving food away to the community, posing a public health risk. Allard responded to Crampton claiming that his office found no evidence of this practice, and that the incidence of disease at the site was relatively low. Most tellingly, though, he noted the high bar preventing him from imposing as a government body on the Love Family: "an informal opinion from our Attorney General's office supports our contention that the Love Family qualifies as a family unit and as such has certain rights that we must respect." This, in conjunction with the finding that the group did not pose a threat to public health, caused Allard to claim that he thus had "no justification for forcing our way into their lives."[360] The Department of Social and Health Services upheld a definition of family that included religious movements. The government had no choice but to take up the definition of family. Sometimes, they sided with NRMs. These religious groups did not create and deploy their own definitions of family in a vacuum, but rather their claims of familyhood could be legitimated by the government, and sometimes at the expense of the nuclear family.

Later in 1979, Crampton learned that President Carter planned to make good on a campaign promise to take seriously the crisis of the family in the United States, finally hosting the White House Conference on Families. She wrote him a letter, expressing concern that conference would leave out one of the most "sinister and destructive" forces affecting the American family: the "pseudo-religious cult." Only a year after Jonestown, she wondered how so little had been done in spite of the obvious potential for violence inherent in these cults. In a letter from December 14, 1979, Crampton claimed that these groups encouraged the "alienation of our youth from society" through their practice of "well-known behavior modification techniques on unknowing victims," and thus posed a "great threat to personal freedom, families, and society at large." Crampton described the mistreatment of her daughter and infant grandchild by the Love Israel family. She felt especially disturbed that in the face of such obvious physical abuse and medical neglect, law enforcement had not "attempted to deal with the problem" and worse, "[o]ur legislators have failed to investigate cult abuses and enact legislation to protect the public from fraud and deception." This negligence, she claimed, was especially "appalling" in the wake of the Jonestown tragedy, which provided tragic evidence of what happened when cults were allowed to operate completely outside of the law or any type of regulation. She volunteered her own participation in the conference, which she hoped would provide an opening for a conversion around how cults might be stopped.[361]

Crampton's desire to participate in the Conference on Families as a concerned NRM parent dovetailed with a broader rightwing attempt to narrowly define the family in a way that

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[359] NBC Evening News, "the Psychology of Cults," November 21, 1978.
[360] Letter from Dr. Jack Allard to Henrietta Crampton, April 27 1979, box 214, folder 9, Louis Jolyon West papers (Collection 590). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.
[361] Letter from Henrietta Crampton to White House Conference on Families, December 14 1979, box 214, folder 9, Louis Jolyon West papers (Collection 590). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

aligned within "traditional" nuclear boundaries. While this narrow definition of family might seem normative, in fact it was just one within a long and tortured debate over the meaning of family, the role of government in family life, and the role of biological families in the religious lives of individuals who chose new faiths. Other historians and observers have noted that these attempts to narrow the definition of family acted as a means of blocking the acceptance of gay Americans in particular into the fold of family life, while the issue of religious sects and their inclusion under the umbrella of family has received less attention.[362] Though this issue has been eclipsed by discussion of more familiar topics of abortion and gay rights, in fact the matter of cults/sects was central in defining family values for the right as well as for bolstering—and at times challenging—the coherence of an evangelical identity and thought in the late 1970s and 1980s.[363]

Jimmy Carter, a devout Christian with liberal racial politics and a strong commitment to the separation of church and state, worked hard by the end of his term to satisfy those concerned about the American family as a social problem. Carter had the undesirable task of balancing two opposing political constituencies. On one hand, the increasingly accepted progressive demands to include gay and single parent families under the family umbrella, and on the other hand conservatives worried about "the family" as a political project and a pillar of American life. Carter tried and failed to balance these two sides, pleasing none and especially angering conservatives who found his permissive attitudes about non-traditional family structures including those of religious sects to be yet another sign of moral decay.

Carter attempted to strike a delicate balance between delineating the family sphere as a private domain that should remain free of government interference on the one hand, while also acknowledging the ways in which "government does touch our families" on the other hand.[364] The conference acted as an important moment in the struggle over family values. Jim Guy Tucker, the chairman of the conference effectively argued for an expansion of the ways in which the welfare state could help all families, including single parent and other nontraditional families. Paul Weyrich and other leaders of the emergent family values-oriented Christian right charged that Carter's conference did not truly address critical issues facing the American family. Rather, the event skewed toward liberal political goals favoring existing government programs. Weyrich claimed that the White House should focus on policies that would really help families and advance a socially conservative agenda, like barring gay people from teaching in public schools and banning abortion. For critics, one of the liberals' more insidious means of advancing their agenda was to expand the definition of family itself. In fact, Beverly La Haye, the famed leader of the conservative Christian group Concerned Women For America, figured that the entire point of the conference was "really geared up toward changing the definition of family" in a way that was inclusive of homosexuals and basically "any two people who chose to live together."[365] Weyrich, La Haye, and other conservatives insisted that the "family" be defined only as a unit in which all people were related, therefore "excluding possible definition of the family to include

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[362] Seth Dowland, "'Family Values' and the Formation of a Christian Right Agenda," *Church History* 78, no. 3 (2009): 607.

[363] For more on the centrality of the WHCF in mobilizing conservative Christians around family values, see Leo P. Ribuffo, "Family Policy Past As Prologue: Jimmy Carter, the White House Conference on Families, and the Mobilization of the New Christian Right.," *Review of Policy Research* 23, no. 2 (March 2006): 311–37.

[364] Spencer Rich, "Carter Opens Conference on Families," *Washington Post*, June 6, 1980.

[365] William C. Martin, *With God on Our Side : The Rise of the Religious Right in America*., 1st ed. (Broadway Books, 1996), 178.

homosexual couples and religious sects."[366] In some sense, this conference marks the end not only of a liberal Christian attitude toward family values in favor of a rightwing one, as some historians have argued, but also a rejection by the right of Carter's permissive attitude toward NRMs with alternative sexual and familial relationships.[367] This was one mechanism by which the right could welcome a group like the Unification Church, which publicly avowed its commitment to the nuclear family, while rejecting groups with alternative, communal styles of living, marriage, and procreation.

Some religious conservative observers of the religious fringe were less concerned with the question of what constituted a family than what constituted a legitimate religion or movement. One significant impact of Jonestown was that it solidified an association between counterculture, NRMs, unorthodox beliefs, and leftwing politics on the one hand and violence on the other. The "New Age" became a cause of special concern in the 1980s for Christian anticultists. New Age beliefs and practices represented the incursion of counterculture into mainstream life. As such, it could stand in for the progressive, non-traditional popular cultural change that so alarmed conservatives and acted as their adversary in the culture wars. The association of Peoples Temple with California was an important part of this logic. In an article in the *San Francisco Examiner* written just after the deaths in Guyana, two co-authors pondered the meaning of California's history of "kooks" and "violents." The notion that California was a place not only for those idealistically seeking utopia, but potentially something much more sinister, would become a common way of sowing mistrust of unfamiliar religious groups who were connected to California's alternative milieus. California, the authors wrote, was "a place of false promises and prophets, where the end of the rainbow vanishes into the sea and the disillusioned seekers of a new life become ripe for salvation." In the wake of Jonestown, the state had "once again…fulfilled its image as a breeding ground for the cultish and eccentric, and increasingly a potential for the orgiastically violent (sic)."[368] This association between spiritual seekers, alternative religions, eccentricity, and violence was new after Jonestown. The New Age, then, became so threatening because it sat at the intersection of the counterculture, against which conservatives waged the culture wars, and the occult, which represented Satan and the Christian battle against evil.[369]

For conservative Christian critics of the New Age, its all-encompassing, difficult-to-define, and fundamentally alternative nature is precisely what made it so dangerous. The term still presents a challenge of neat definition for scholars. Some experts like George Chryssides have pointed out that even if one finds the term New Age analytically useful, it would be incorrect to categorize it as an NRM as it encompasses a system (or systems) of beliefs that are

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[366] Spencer Rich, "Carter Opens Conference on Families," *Washington Post*, June 6, 1980.

[367] Flippen has argued that Carter's ultimately liberal handling of family issues, including at the WHCF, led to the consolidation of family values as a rightwing political tool. For more, see: J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens; London: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

[368] Richard Saltus and Peter H. King, "California's History of Cults: From Kooks to the Violents," *San Francisco Examiner*, November 23, 1978.

[369] Like New Age, the definition of the "occult" is broad. According to one definition, the occult can include "a vast spectrum of beliefs and practices sourced by Eastern spirituality, Paganism, Spiritualism, theosophy, alternative science and medicine, popular psychology…and a range of beliefs emanating out of the general cultural interest in the paranormal." (Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West: Volume 1 Alternative Spiritualities, Sacralization, Popular Culture and Occulture* (A&C Black, 2005), 69–70.) For Christian critics in the 1980s, the occult usually meant beliefs outside of oppositional to Christianity, including pagan beliefs and Satanic worship.

far too broad to constitute a single religion.[370] For my purposes the New Age is an NRM inasmuch as the ACM took it up as a cause among other cult-related issues. As such, I treat the New Age as a movement "held together by a shared set of symbols and metaphors" involving "metaphysical unity" drawn from newer esoteric movements like Theosophy as well as Eastern religious traditions.[371] The New Age stemmed from the counterculture and hippie ethos of the 1960s, and also reflected the diffusion of the hippie movement after the 1960s. As their popularity waned, many hippie beliefs and influences—a diverse set including the notion of the world's oneness, understanding and expanding consciousness, engaging with mysticism, tarot, crystals, and other alternative practices and interests—cohered into a New Age philosophy that appealed more broadly.

In the 1980s, the rise of conservative evangelicalism led to more frequently vocalized fears of Satanism and the occult, rather than opposition to specific NRMs, which had categorized both the Christian and broader ACM in the 1970s. The more traditional ACM still operated, and even professionalized in this period.[372] At the same time, by the 1980s religious anticult voices were increasingly synchronous with those in wider culture proclaiming the dangers of satanism, occultism, and the pervasiveness of evil. Where in the 1970s and early 1980s anticult activists trained their sights on specific adversaries like the Unification Church, by the mid-1980s the threat was more diffuse, arriving mainly in the form of New Age spirituality and movements. The cults of the 1970s provided anticultists with clear enemies, people with names and faces. These adversaries had clear political, financial, and personal goals in recruiting and maintaining cult membership. The New Age was different. Many Americans participated in New Age practices and thought which did not demand total commitment or formal conversion. In her groundbreaking 1980 book, *The Aquarian Conspiracy,* Marilyn Ferguson outlined a massive paradigm shift that touched nearly all aspects of public and private life. Like the evangelical lawyer, author, and anti-New Age crusader Constance Cumbey, the Jim and Marcia Rudin saw in New Age movements not a harmless intuitional spiritual practice, but a system that so corroded rationality and traditional normative thinking that it could render a person totally without psychological grounding.

Constance Cumbey, a lawyer and author from Detroit, was among the more energetic Christian anticultists in the 1980s. She was also ecumenical in the sense that she connected a broad constellation of issues to her crusade against cults and the New Age. For Cumbey, the New Age did not mean a diffuse and ultimately benign mix of spiritualism, occultism, eastern influences, and counterculture. The New Age for Cumbey was as bad as, and synonymous with, Naziism and the other basest forms of human behavior and society. Her 1983 book, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: the New Age and Our Coming Age of Barbarism*, became a bestseller among anticult audiences. Cumbey's work shared much with the writings of other anticult religious figures before her, but also reflected a Christian belief in the real—rather than metaphorical—nature of concepts like Naziism, Satan, and other embodiments of evil.

In some ways, *Hidden Dangers* acted as a response to Marilyn Ferguson's 1980 best-seller *the Aquarian Conspiracy*. Following the example of the French Jesuit Priest Pierre

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[370] George Chryssides, "Defining the New Age" in James Lewis and Daren Kemp, *Handbook of New Age* (Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 19.

[371] James R. Lewis and Jesper Aagaard Petersen, eds., *Controversial New Religions*, Second edition (Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 139.

[372] For more on the consolidation and professionalization of the ACM, see Eileen Barker, "From Cult Wars to Constructive Cooperation—Well, Sometimes" in *Cult Wars in Historical Perspective*, 12.

Teilhard de Chardin, Ferguson used the word "conspiracy" in a positive sense. Teilhard de Chardin had spoken of a "conspiracy of love," which for Ferguson captured a beautiful and literal sense of the word conspiracy—to breathe together.[373] She chose the word Aquarian to signify a wonderful New Age following the dark and violent Piscean age. The title's reference to astrology as well as to religious writings reflected Ferguson's capacious style. In *The Aquarian Conspiracy*, she drew from scientific research, trends in politics and culture, examples in literature and art, and a host of other sources to demonstrate a massive paradigm shift. The 'conspirators' in her work ranged from everyday people to those with immense power, all of whom welcomed a new world and new, more connected forms of consciousness. The New Age was something to celebrate, a time where people all around the world could throw off the shackles of old ways of thinking and relating and enter a fresh period of common consciousness and transformation.

Reading Ferguson from the perspective of conservative Christians like Constance Cumbey, the Aquarian conspiracy was less a revolution with universal benefits and more so an attack on a familiar, and sacred, way of life. The opening lines of the book would have sounded like a promise for fellow conspirators, but like a threat to Cumbey and others: "A leaderless but powerful network is working to bring about radical change in the United States. Its members have broken with certain key elements of Western thought, and they may even have broken continuity with history."[374] Ferguson's work as well as other New Age literature provided Cumbey with evidence that a conspiracy was under way. No matter how loudly Ferguson and others proclaimed that the movement was leaderless, to Cumbey it was in fact highly disciplined and structured by many complex systems, tables, matrixes, and other forms of organization. Ultimately, the New Agers wanted to install a "New World Order" that would see the persecution of Christians and Jews and the veneration of a new antichrist.

Cumbey took comparison between Nazis and New Agers, often used as a metaphor by anticult rabbis and others to demonstrate the urgency of the cult threat, to a literal extreme. Cumbey described the New Age as hiding behind messages of love and peace, when in fact "point-for-point the program of the New Age Movement had complete identity with Naziism."[375] Occultism drove Adolf Hitler to his dastardly designs in the 1930s, and once again reared its ugly head for "identical" purposes. Where Rabbis like Marc Tanenbaum and Jim Rudin had warned of antisemitic beliefs in some NRMs, and thought that the whole practice of cult recruitment felt authoritarian and perhaps Nazi-ish, none had taken the thesis as far as Cumbey in claiming that NRMs—and specifically the diffuse New Age, was literally Naziism.

Many activists like Ted Patrick and Bob Dole insisted that there was no First Amendment issue at stake in the investigation and possible regulation of NRMs because they were not religions, and thus there were no legitimate claims of religious freedom to violate. Cumbey took quite a different stance: "Make no mistake about it! The New Age Movement *is* a religion complete with its own Bibles, prayers and mantras, Vatican City/Jerusalem equivalents, priests and gurus, born-again experiences (they call it "rebirthing"), spiritual laws and commandments, psychics and "prophets," and nearly every other indicia of a religion."[376] She concluded that the

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[373] Marilyn Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy: Personal and Social Transformation in Our Time*, Revised ed. edition (New York: TarcherPerigee, 2009), xxiii.
[374] Ferguson, *The Aquarian Conspiracy,* 1.
[375] Constance Cumbey, *The Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow: The New Age Movement and Our Coming Age of Barbarism*, Revised Edition edition (Shreveport, La: Huntington House, 1983), 56.
[376] Cumbey, *Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*, 40.

best course would be a holy war, fighting fundamentalism with fundamentalism: "It is time we Christians stop apologizing for our fundamentalism and orthodoxy," she proclaimed.[377] Such spinelessness only allowed critics to claim that Hitler's problem was fundamentalism, rather than occultism. Millions of innocent people were the victims of those familiar cultist tactics—mind control and brainwashing—without even knowing it, and only true faith in God and the promotion of Christian morals could defeat the insidious creep of the New Age.

Suspicions of New Age belief were not merely the purview of Christians, and in some senses these concerns were still ecumenical and bipartisan. Husband and wife team Marcia and Jim Rudin, the Jewish anticultists, might have recoiled at some of Cumbey's more extremist language but agreed with parts of her assessment. As the 1980s ended, they saw the cult threat not as lessening in influence, but as becoming a more mainstream part of American religious and popular life in the form of New Age beliefs and practices. They acknowledged that the days of extreme shocks of violence as in Jonestown seemed a distant memory, and thus the cults themselves seemed less powerful or relevant. Not so: the Hare Krishnas had not stopped soliciting, even if they had shed their saffron robes. One example of the insidious yet quietly enduring impacts of cults was on the business world, as more and more corporations turned to self-help and human potential-style movements like est (Erhard Seminar Trainings). While groups like est claimed to help people reach full development and potential in a way that benefitted both the individual and a business's culture (and bottom line), the Rudins maintained that in fact these "mass mind therapy and mind-empowerment movements" were dangerous and could lead to extreme distress. The human mind—and spirit—was too precious and powerful a thing to be left in the hands of "untrained" session leaders who could precipitate real crisis in participants. The encroachment of new spirituality, and the encouragement of playing with one's consciousness in the workplace, served as just one example of the larger problem the Rudins saw.[378] Comparing NRMs to Naziism, fascism, and other totalitarian movements was by the 1980s a well-worn tactic of the ACM. The Rudins warned against the quiet adoption of New Age practices in everyday areas of life, as "the 20th century has already experienced enough pain and suffering from the 'totalistic thinking' of both individuals and national political movements."[379] This analysis ignored a parallel totalism of the culture wars, in which any area of society was fair game for battles over American identity and politics.

One of the biggest shifts from the cult wars of the 1970s to the culture wars in the 1980s involved the perception that fringe and non-normative religions/belief systems invaded the home. These fears publicly manifested explicitly in terms of the Satanic and occult. The common model of parental anguish in the 1970s involved a young person leaving home and getting mixed up in unfamiliar, and unacceptable, movements. Maybe it was on a college campus, or on a boardwalk, or at a party, but somewhere outside the home the youth would encounter an agent of a certain group, who would then gain their trust and slowly (or quickly) recruit them into an NRMs. Parents like Henrietta Crampton spent immense amounts of energy and effort trying to simply locate or contact their relative. Because by and large these people were adults, there was little recourse for concerned relatives who were mostly relegated to advocating for their cause in the media and, occasionally, in the courts. But by the 1980s, a widespread fear took hold that

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[377] Cumbey, *Hidden Dangers of the Rainbow*, 98.
[378] A. James and Marcia Rudin, "New Age: New Dark Age," *New York Daily News*, November 26 1989, box 1, folder 1. MS 782. A. James Rudin Papers. American Jewish Archives, Cincinnati, Ohio.
[379] Ibid.

dangerous, and violent, cultic/Satanic influences invaded the lives of young people through the culture they consumed within the family home.

Scholars and observers have termed this specific moral panic "the Satanic Panic," which shared much and in significant ways was produced by the cult scare of the 1970s, but also represented important developments and departures from ways in which parents had typically worried about NRMs and the occult. The phrase Satanic Panic encompasses a slew of accusations and beliefs centering on the notion that Satanists ran rampant in the United States, and in particular that they tortured, raped, abused, or killed children as part of their rituals. The most famous legal case of the Satanic Panic was the McMartin pre-school trial, named for the pre-school in which teachers were falsely accused of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA) which lasted from 1983 to 1987. Famously, some of the most touted evidence of these crimes was testimony from children themselves, who were coaxed by detectives and other adults to testify that they had been sexually, physically, mentally, and spiritually abused by trusted caregivers, usually neighbors and daycare workers. The case resulted in no convictions due to a lack of physical evidence. By its end, it was the most expensive and lengthy trial in U.S. history, and resulted in the wrongful imprisonment of former McMartin pre-school teacher Raymond Buckey. Another important example of SRA came from the 1980 memoir *Michelle Remembers*, co-authored by Michelle Smith and her psychiatrist Lawrence Pazdar. Pazdar claimed that while under his care, Michelle was able to recover repressed memories of Satanic Abuse.[380] The entire episode was later discredited, both because there existed no evidence to corroborate Michelle's claims and because of suspicion over Pazdar's competency as a provider after he and Smith later married.

Fears around occult activities, and even apparently benign cultural products like heavy metal music or the role-playing game Dungeons and Dragons, stemmed from a longer history of fears about religious difference and the political implications of fringe and radical religious movements. They also became centered on actual children and teenagers, rather than young adults with full legal rights. Parents now had to be vigilant not only about the incursion of nefarious influences on their children at school, or at parties, but at home. One information packet furnished by the SFPD warned in particular about metal music, punk rock, and roleplaying fantasy games as especially influential in leading a kid toward Satanism.[381] The Satanic Panic raised the stakes for law enforcement agencies whose roles had been much clearer regarding "cultic" activity in the 1970s. The main handwringing then had been about the role of the state in regulating and defining religious activity in order to protect potential cult recruits *before* crimes were committed, or to help shut down destructive organizations capable of committing crimes. Everyone agreed, however, that religion was not and should not be a cover for the violation of laws and statutes on the part of NRMs. Thus, even during the most controversial period of the cult wars in the 1970s, the police would only become involved when a law was broken or someone was in imminent danger.

In the 1980s, serious—though ultimately uncredible—claims of satanically motivated crimes thrust law enforcement into a new role with regard to the occult. Law enforcement worked off of supposed victims' stories, in spite of the fact that they were small children and not necessarily reliable witnesses, as well as a variety of highly publicized accounts and numbers cooked up by so-called experts. An astounding level of mental gymnastics is required to get to

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[380] Michelle Smith, *Michelle Remembers*, 1st ed. (New York: Congdon & Lattes, 1980).
[381] Sandy Gallant, packet on Satanism prepared for police use, 1985, Box 235, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[381] Ibid.

the numbers of alleged victims of abuse some claimed: one police report cites Dr. Al Carlisle of the Utah State Prison System, who estimated that "between forty and sixty thousand human beings are killed through ritual homicides in the United States each year."[382] Dr. Carlisle did not arrive at this number using any physical evidence, but merely through conjecture—even the report admits that the Satanists' secrecy and effectiveness made verification difficult. His explained his method thus: "The statistic itself is based upon an estimated number of Satanists at the level where they commit ritual human sacrifices times the frequency with which these would be done during a calendar year."[383] This packet cited Mike Warnke as an expert on Satanism. Warnke famously fabricated a memoir, *The Satan Seller*, which he claimed described his time as a Satanist. This book, published in 1972, promoted the notion that Satanism was alive and well in the United States. Though Warnke's story was debunked in 1992, he still acted as an expert on Satanism for the duration of the Satanic Panic in the 1980s. The absurdity of the situation belies the devastating consequences. Dozens of people across the country were imprisoned, stripped of their homes and assets, and deprived of their parental rights as a result of baseless accusations of Satanic ritual child abuse.

Often, police departments' main concern was the potential for violence and crime inherent in Satanic and occult worship. This distinguished them from more religiously motivated observers and groups, including Constance Cumbey, who took Satanism more literally. While this distinction is meaningful to a point, concern over the side effects of "Satanism" as a cultural phenomenon ultimately bonded both secular and religious anti-occultists. As in the cult wars of the 1970s, what mattered most was the belief that impressionable people adhered absolutely to a dangerous dogma or person, rather than belief in the doctrine itself.[384] What this meant in practice was that without accepting outright the beliefs of Christian anti-occultists who thought Satan was real and present, law enforcement deployed more secular and clinical but equally difficult-to-prove (and ultimately disproven) theories about psychology, brainwashing, and mind control.

For law enforcement, parents, and grassroots organizations, heavy metal and rock music acted a central conduit for satanic influence. While anticult organizations did not take up the censorship of popular music directly, it was the very same ideas about brainwashing, impressionable youth, and sinister forces out to corrupt American youth and alienate them from their parents that animated both the ACM and crusades against rock music. Backmasking, the idea that satanic messages could be heard if you played popular records backwards, became the subject of much debate—and an argument for the censorship of certain types of music. There was even a 1982 bill proposed in California, a state not known for its ultraconservative attitudes toward cultural production and consumption, that would have included warning labels on "backmasked" records with messages glorifying Satanism and the occult.[385] The 1979 Dole meeting was one very public and officially-sanctioned forum where psychologists and other experts testified to dubious and ultimately destructive tactics to control and corrupt impressionable youths. The new focus on heavy metal, popular culture, and the occult

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[383] Compilation of notes and material received at the I.P.T.M. Cults, Sects, and Deviant Movements Seminar, Jacksonville, Florida, in March, 1986. Compiled by Lt. L. M. Jones, Boise Police Department, Box 235, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.

[384] Ibid.

[385] For more on AB 3741 and other attempts to regulate backmasking and censor rock music in the 1980s, see John Brackett, "Satan, Subliminals, and Suicide: The Formation and Development of an Antirock Discourse in the United States during the 1980s," *American Music* 36, no. 3 (December 5, 2018): 271–302.

represented a continuation of these same tactics and concerns, but with a conservative Christian bent.

The most high-profile effort to counter the dangerous influence of popular music was led by the Parents Music Resource Center, helmed by Tipper Gore. Formed in 1985, the group's stated mission was to educate parents and the public about explicit themes in popular music. They created a rating system and the now iconic black-and-white warning label, which has been emblazoned on the front of every "explicit" album since the mid-1980s. The PMRC united a variety of conservative causes, ranging from the opposition to pornographic content to Satanism. It was also importantly bipartisan. Tipper Gore was the wife of Al Gore, who would soon rank among the most important Democratic politicians in the nation. The PMRC insisted that its goal was not censorship but education. This set them apart from some more radical conservatives, like William F. Buckley, who argued that explicit music was tantamount to child abuse and thus should be literally banned by the government.[386] The PMRC's recommendations were milder, proposing a ratings system not dissimilar to that of the film industry, with its age-based tier system. The system for records would not be based on age groups, but rather the content of the lyrics: a "V" for violence, "X" for sexually explicit content, "D/A" for substances, and an "O" for "occult references."

In September of 1985 the Senate's Committee on Commerce held a high-profile televised hearing on record labeling. Among the members of the committee was Al Gore, who offered opening remarks. Gore began his remarks in terms that echoed Senator Bob Dole's preemptive First Amendment defense in every public meeting on cults with which he was involved. Gore insisted that "the proposals made by those concerned about this problem do not involve a government role of any kind whatsoever. They are not asking for any form of censorship or regulation of speech in any manner, shape, or form."[387] In addition to the Gores, members of various organizations which advocated for oversight, if not outright censorship, of music, television, comics, and video games made their case to congress and to the public. They cited dangers posed by explicit lyrics, including teen suicides and pregnancies, as well as the incitement of violence and devil worship.

Musicians like Frank Zappa, John Denver, and Dee Snider testified on behalf of free speech and artistic expression. Snider's band, Twisted Sister, counted itself among those groups specially targeted by Tipper Gore and the PMRC. Snider argued passionately for the chilling effect of the proposed labeling and rating system, but claimed that Gore and others had misinterpreted his lyrics. In spite of his gender-bending, metal appearance and famous songs of rebellion like "We're Not Gonna Take It," Snider insisted that he was not only a moral person, but a God-fearing one. "I am 30 years old," Snider began, "I am married, I have a three-year-old son. I was born and raised a Christian and still adhere to those principles. Believe it or not, I do not smoke, I do not drink, I do not do drugs."[388] Snider agreed with Gore that parents had a responsibility to monitor what popular culture their children consumed, and when pressed by the committee chairman about how parents would be aware of the content, Snider replied: "Well, quite simply, as a parent myself and as a rock fan, I know that when I see an album cover with a severed goat's head in the middle of a pentagram between a woman's legs, that is not the kind of

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[386] Hartman, *A War for the Soul of America*, 177.
[387] "Record Labeling," Hearing before the Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, US Senate, 99th Congress, September 19, 1985.
[388] Ibid.

album I want my son to be listening to."[389] Faced with a question about the limits of acceptable content, even Dee Snider was ready to throw metal, and symbols of the occult, under the proverbial bus.

While the hearing attracted significant press, ultimately Gore and the PMRC could not win, being too mild for conservatives and too extreme for progressives. They did succeed, however, in promoting the ultimately conservative idea—shared by much of the ACM—that culture and exposure by itself could be outright harmful for impressionable youths, and that parents had a personal and political responsibility to defend their families and youth in general.[390] The PMRC's insistence that these efforts did not constitute censorship belied the fact that according to their diagnosis, this art represented a real and toxic public nuisance and should be understood as dangerous by parents. Linking the consumption of popular culture to not only the development of unhealthy, transgressive beliefs but to real harm like teen suicide encouraged the public to acknowledge the violence inherent in these forms of expression.

By 1985, the US was in the midst of a full-blown moral panic around Satanism and the occult. Less than a week after the hearings on rock music and explicit lyrics—including occult references—North Carolina Senator Jesse Helms once again raised the issue of Satanism and witchcraft on Capitol Hill. On September 26, he proposed the following amendment to an appropriations bill:

> No funds appropriated under this Act shall be used to grant, maintain, or allow tax exemption to any cult, organization, or other group that has as a purpose, or that has any interest in, the promoting of satanism or witchcraft: *Provided*, That for purposes of this section, "satanism" is defined as the worship of Satan or the powers of evil and "witchcraft" is defined as the use of powers derived from evil spirits, the use of sorcery, or the use of supernatural powers with malicious intent.[391]

Helms went on to enter into the record a lengthy excerpt of the "Devil Worshippers" episode of the news program *20/20*, which aired in May of 1985 to blockbuster ratings. The episode began by acknowledging the lack of physical evidence in cases of Satanic Ritual Abuse (SRA): "Police have been skeptical when investigating these acts, just as we are in reporting them. But there is no question that something is going on out there, and that's sufficient reason for '20/20' to look into it."[392] Real, compelling evidence was not a prerequisite for recklessly stoking a panic about child abuse—if so many people felt concerned, there had to be "sufficient" cause. This episode, as well as others on popular talk shows like *the Phil Donahue Show*, boosted ratings by convincing Americans that Satanic worship was real, popular, and growing in its influence. That these sensationalistic and overblown exposés were entered into the congressional record demonstrates how closely tied the cult scare had become to political Christian concerns. Ten years earlier, panic over the nefarious intent and influence of the Unification Church had to do

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[389] Ibid.

[390] It is worth noting as Andrew Hartman and other historians have observed, parental advisory labels and the censorship of popular music continued well into the 1990s. Rap music became the main target of these efforts, which became racialized as they focused on Black artists. In this era, depictions of sex, drugs, and the objectification of women propelled controversy more so than Satanism and the occult.

[391] See Senator Helms speaking on HR 3036, 99th Cong., 1st sess., Congressional Record 131 (September 26, 1985): S 25077—25080.

[392] 20/20, "The Devil-Worshippers," aired May 16, 1985. Notably, Kenneth Wooden, who wrote *The Children of Jonestown* and was influential in the linking of cults and child abuse, is credited as a producer of the episode.

with the group's political goals and the potential of a non-Democratic movement to wreak havoc on the United States. By 1985, there was a new engine of anti-NRM sentiment: Christian fears of the devil.

Echoing efforts by Bob Dole a decade earlier, Helms concluded with his efforts to work in tandem with the IRS on the matter of the occult, flabbergasted that these groups could possibly gain any tax benefits or legal recognition of religious status. In response, Helms received a letter from the Secretary of the Treasury on July 19, 1985. While the secretary agreed that it would be untenable to consider groups with intentions to commit crimes as legitimate religions, there were plenty of groups that met the standard for religious exemption and also believed in some form of witchcraft. In the end, the IRS held to its stance that they were not there to adjudicate what constituted a legitimate religion, as long at the exempt group met the minimum standards of not harming the public good and holding sincere beliefs. Helms was not satisfied by this response: "after all, Mr. President, we allow tax-exempt status for bona fide religious organizations because we believe they help promote the common good. Cults and witchcraft groups do not; in fact, they lead to violent and unlawful behavior."[393] It was well and good to protect the right to free worship, but for Helms and other conservatives, there was no conceivable purpose of practices including witchcraft—which Helms lumped in with all Satanic practices—other than to commit crimes and harm the public.[394] How could religion like this avoid regulation and consequences?

Helms, Gore, and other politicians took pages out of Bob Dole's book in their crusade against the occult, but Dole himself by 1985 had recused himself of most anticult activities, in Congress and elsewhere. Throughout the early 1980s, Dole and other congressmen continued to address the NRM/cult issue in Congress, both directly and indirectly. Representative Richard Ottinger, one of Dole's closest congressional allies on the cult issue, attempted to hold his own "informal" hearing on cults toward the end of 1979. The Baptist Joint Committee and other mainstream religious bodies continued their protest, saying that they believed cult to be a "pejorative term [that] has no place in American law."[395] Ottinger was especially interested in conservatorships—the process by which parents were able to gain temporary legal guardianship of their adult children because of diminished capacity. Other state-level initiatives likewise focused in on the legal rights of families who had "lost" relatives to cults. According to NRM legal historian James Lewis, anticult activists in the 1970s had failed to criminalize the promotion of NRMs themselves, thus leading them in the late 1970s and 1980s to lobby for conservatorships rather than the criminalization of a given group or recruitment tactic.[396]

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[393] Ibid, 25080.

[394] Helms and other Christians tended to lump together disparate belief systems like witchcraft, the occult, Satanism, the New Age, etc. In fact, the collapsing of these movements represented an antagonistic and Christian worldview. For instance the Wiccan religion, many of whose adherents self-identify as witches, has roots in ancient, pre-Christian pagan beliefs. This religion shares little with modern Satanism, which generally views Satan as a metaphor for rationalism, hedonism, and secularism, and as a means of mobilizing for political action in service of the separation of church and state. Further, this version of Satanism is totally distinct from the non-existent Satanic cults accused of child abuse in the 1980s.

[395] Letter from Baptist Joint Committee on Public Affairs (James Wood) to Richard Ottinger, July 19, 1979, Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 363, folder 9, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas

[396] Lewis, *Cults: a Reference and Guide*, 74. Lewis writes sympathetically but compellingly about legal battles between NRMs and the ACM. He also notes that a more direct tactic followed conservatorship efforts in courts, as ex-members began suing groups for damages in the 1990s. These cases had greater success rates than other tactics,

Advocates of conservatorships and other legal recourses that privileged the rights of families of NRM recruits in 1980s often referred to Jonestown as a shorthand for why these kinds of laws were necessary. In 1982, the New Jersey State Senate passed a bill to allow family members to "rescue" loved ones from cults, giving them guardianship for forty-five days during which time they would come up with a program to rehabilitate their relative. Matthew Feldman, a Democrat, said that while he usually would not support government interference into religious affairs, the bill responded to "relentless brainwashing by religious cults" which were "bent on destroying the lives of thousands of young men and women." In order to further make his case Feldman contrasted Peoples Temple with "religion": "Can anyone explain Jonestown?...We're not talking about religion. We're talking about manipulation and control of an individual."[397] Morris Yanoff, an author and grandfather of two Hare Krishna devotees, made similar distinctions in the *Chicago Tribune* 6 years after Jonestown.[398] He advocated for the passage of the Illinois Temporary Guardianship Act, which would have similarly granted temporary rights to family members before the NRM members were able to voluntarily return to their group. He said the bill, supported by ACM organizations like the Citizens Freedom Foundation, would help people caught up in "Jones-like groups."[399] Thomas Robbins, a longtime NRM scholar and defender, objected to Yanoff's comments and endorsement of the bill, writing that the bill would have dangerous implications for the state in the "deconversion" of devotees from "unpopular sects." Yanoff elaborated on the distinction, again using Jonestown and Peoples Temple as an example of the violent nature of cults. "I would side with Mr. Robbins," Yanoff wrote, "if it were simply a matter of "unpopular sects," but suppose, like Jonestown, it was a destructive sect?"[400] Jonestown thus allowed advocates like Yanoff to attach words like violent and destructive to NRMs by association as a means of permitting more forceful laws against them than might have been less acceptable for a widely recognized religious group.

The most public cultfighter of the 1970s, Bob Dole did not back down after the controversy around his Capitol Hill meeting. In fact, he doubled down on his efforts, even if these efforts became less public after 1979. That year his office hired a legislative assistant on a volunteer basis named Ann Lindgren. When Ann's son was recruited by the Unification Church, Dole's office—specifically his main legislative assistant working on cult issues, Ernie Garcia—had helped the family by providing them with information and support. Ann's son went to volunteer for Ernie in the summer of 1979, and when he went back to school in the fall Ann decided to take his place.[401] Over the course of the next several years, Ann would build up Dole's already impressive dossier on cults before leaving in 1984 to commit herself full-time to the Citizen's Freedom Foundation, one of the main national anticult organizations.

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largely because they allowed courts to circumvent many sticky church-state questions and focus rather on one individual's experience.

[397] Tom Johnson, "Mechanism Passes to Rescue Cult-Bound," *The Newark Star-Ledger*, October 26 1982, Box 234, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.

[398] Yanoff's family was involved in a complex dispute over his grandson, who became deeply involved in the Hare Krishna movement in his tween and teen years along with his mother, who was a member of the group. This is an example of a case where a minor was involved in NRM activity, but still not without the support and approval of a parent.

[399] Morris Yanoff, "Some Lessons From Jonestown," *The Chicago Tribune,* November 18, 1984.

[400] Morris Yanoff, "In Defense of Temporary Guardian Act," *The Chicago Tribune*, January 15, 1985.

[401] Ann Lindgren, memo to Mike Pettit, September 13 1983 Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 363, folder 1, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

Dole proclaimed his opposition to cults less loudly after the 1979 meeting, but his office kept an eye on NRM/cult-related activity especially within Congress. Jonestown remained a specter in these efforts. In 1983, congressman Mervyn Dymally of California proposed a bill, House Resolution 217, that called for the Judiciary Committee to conduct hearings on "the subject of governmental intervention in religious affairs of the United States." Dymally was especially concerned with a lack of enforcement and protections around deprogramming—the forcible abduction of NRM members—and the granting of conservatorships for relatives of converts. The bill also mentioned use of the US tax code to define what religions could or could not receive exemptions. Dymally, a Black Democrat from California, did not approach the issue of religious freedom from the same vantage point as conservative white evangelicals. Dymally had held a hearing on the treatment of youth in California by cults in 1974, heading up one of the first government forums into the actions of fringe religions. More recently, however, Dymally had worked closely with Jim Jones and Peoples Temple, serving as a critical liaison between Jones and the ruling party in Guyana, where Jonestown was located. As a native of the Caribbean with deep concern and sympathy for global Black liberation, Dymally offered political sympathy as well as legitimacy to Jones's project.

This connection, while not widely publicized, was not lost on Dole's office. His main cult research aide, Ann Lindgren, not only disagreed with the premise of Dymally's bill but felt suspicious at his motivations. She wrote a letter to another congressional aide whose boss was on the Subcommittee on Civil and Constitutional Rights, the Subcommittee responsible for the referring the bill to the Committee on Monopolies and Commercial law. She enclosed a letter written by Dymally to/on behalf of Jones, writing "Helen, here is a copy of the Dymally letter. It is from a reliable source and the Oct '77 date was many months after Jones had been exposed in numerous ways by serious journalists."[402] She then encouraged her to share this letter with the other members of the subcommittee. The bill went nowhere, and Dymally's connection to Peoples Temple did not seem to cause much of a stir. Still, Dole's office clearly remained actively involved in watching cult issues throughout congress, and demonstrated a distrust of other congressmen around the cult issue.

While some Christian conservatives strove to harness the power of government to curb cult/occult influences, others solidified alliances with NRMs that would have been unthinkable in the 1970s. Specifically, the Unification Church and its leader, Sun Myung Moon, experienced a meteoric rise in influence and public political favor in the 1980s. This turnaround seems especially spectacular considering the UC attracted perhaps the most negative attention of any NRM in the 1970s. This shift in fortune came from a confluence of factors, both within and beyond the UC's control. Having successfully lobbied for its inclusion into the conservative religious fold in the wake of Jonestown, the church abandoned efforts to fit into the counterculture ethos of 1960s and 1970s NRMs. By the 1980s, it presented as a respectable, conservative, small Christian church, with shared religious and political values in common with the Christian right. In some sense, the religious politics of the Republican Party caught up to the UC at a critical moment. It was able to contribute meaningfully, and in a variety of ways, to the trifecta of 1980s conservatism. First, Moon's imprisonment on tax charges further solidified, in a very public way, his status as a victim of unjust and dangerous religious persecution by the

[402] Note written by Ann Lindgren to Helen (last name unknown), 1983, Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 362, folder 5, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

government and made his case a cause of religious freedom advocacy. Second, the group's conservative morals around sex and commitment to the family jibed well with the increasingly salient "family values" politics coming to define the culture wars. Third, its long-term commitment to anticommunist causes was welcome by the GOP and by the 1980s. The UC had the vast funds to effect real change and action in this arena as it funded powerful organizations like CAUSA to fight the scourge of communism globally.

For Jesse Helms, it was self-evident that the IRS religiously-based tax exemption should not go to so-called cults, and that such groups claiming this exemption did so on a disingenuous basis. This view, which he shared with Bob Dole and many others, became eclipsed by a more broad-based evangelical opposition to government interference with religious freedom especially in matters relating to taxation. In the 1970s, the UC had been Dole's main public example of the IRS religious exemption gone too far: how could the IRS grant this organization, with its questionable recruitment practices and global political machinations, exemption as a legitimate religion? By the 1980s, Moon's imprisonment on tax evasion charges—among Dole's goals—became a cause célèbre of religious leaders concerned about religious autonomy. While the outcry around Moon's imprisonment was bipartisan and multiracial, with prominent ministers from the Black church defending Moon, white conservative leaders like Jerry Falwell and Robert Grant were especially vocal around the injustices they felt were heaped upon Reverend Moon.

The Moon case not only spoke to the critically important issue of religious freedom. It also hit on the particular sensitivity of evangelical religious leaders on the issue of taxation. For Falwell and white evangelicals, this was tied to the controversial Bob Jones University case. Taxation and government interference over the 1970s and early 1980s became religious, rather than just political, issues, as religious leaders increasingly felt that they operated in opposition to the government. At the same time, Black progressive religious leaders like Joseph Lowery of the Southern Christian Leadership conference also saw the Moon case as potentially threatening their church's autonomy, but for different reasons. First, Lowery quickly noted the bipartisan nature of the case, warning that it would be "foolish" to think "that any shade or position on the liberal/conservative spectrum" would be safe from government incursion. He especially worried for "smaller churches—black and other minorities" in which the minister might take on sole fiscal responsibility for the church and thus be more vulnerable to prosecution.[403] Moon's imprisonment thus linked a remarkable assortment of religious leaders who would have made unlikely bedfellows in any other context around issues not just of religious freedom but of the ability of churches to act autonomously in matters of finance and taxation.

According to UC historian and Church member Michael Mickler, Dole's calls for IRS oversight regarding the UC's taxes in the 1970s spurred real action, as "a squad of IRS agents had taken up permanent offices in the Unification Church's downtown New York headquarters, while a team of field agents began round the clock surveillance of selected Church members and their telephones."[404] Whether or not the IRS became interested in Moon's taxes immediately

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[403] Compilation of statements on Reverend Moon's case, Legislative Assistants collection (Ann Lindgren), box 363, folder 3, Robert and Elizabeth Dole Archive and Special Collections, Robert J. Dole Institute of Politics, University of Kansas.

[404] Michael L. Mickler, "No Stranger to Litigation: Court Cases Involving the Unification Church/Family Federation in the United States," in *Reactions to the Law by Minority Religions* (Routledge, 2020), 80. It is important to emphasize that Mickler is a church member, and referenced for this claim Carlton Sherwood's 1991 book, *Inquisition: the Persecution and Prosecution of Reverend Sung Myung Moon*. The objectivity of Sherwood's account, as well as the potential role of Moon himself in vetting and editorializing the book's contents, have raised questions and as such the source should be taken with a grain of salt.

following Dole's initial 1976 meeting, it's clear that it became the target of increasing scrutiny in the second half of the 1970s. On October 15, 1981, a federal grand jury indicted Moon on a host of tax charges, mostly around false returns he filed from 1973-1975.[405] The government claimed that during these years Moon deposited $1.6 million into a Chase Bank account without reporting it as personal income, though he still received interest on the money as taxable income. Similarly, Moon failed to report income from his investment in Tong 11 Enterprises, a Korean company. The government treated this money as Moon's own, and thus subject to New York state and federal income taxes. Moon and his legal team insisted that he was in fact holding these assets on behalf of the church, and that it ultimately belonged to the church rather than to Moon for personal use. Moon was convicted on all counts, and his convictions were upheld on appeal in 1983. He was sentenced to 18 months in prison, and served 13 of those months at a Federal Correctional Institution in Danbury, Connecticut, before completing his sentence at a halfway house.

The case amplified divisions that had emerged during the Dole hearings, with advocates of religious freedom rallying behind Moon and anticultists celebrating the decision. During the appeal, groups like the Center for Law and Religious Freedom, the ACLU and the NYCLU, and the National Ministries for the American Baptist Churches submitted amicus curiae briefs on behalf of Moon and his confidant/co-appellant, Takeru Kamiyama. To these observers, the case seemed like a ploy to punish an unpopular religious leader on shaky charges, violating his freedom to operate his church according to common practices.

Most importantly, some of the most powerful and recognizable figures in religious politics chose to take up Moon's cause. In characteristic fashion, Moon did not end his sentence and quietly return to the UC's daily operations. He and his right-hand-man Bo Hi Pak ensured that there was much fanfare around the Reverend's return to freedom. Reverend Moon was released at 12:01am on August 20, 1985. At 2pm, a team of highly influential religious leaders, including Jerry Falwell and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference's Joseph Lowery, convened at the National Press Club in Washington DC to discuss religious freedom and Reverend Moon's case. Falwell was at that time the most powerful and influential evangelical in the United States, having founded the Moral Majority in 1979. The Moral Majority, and Falwell as its leader, became the public face of evangelical political activism, and in particular a family-values oriented social conservatism. Lowery, on the other hand, was a minister in the United Methodist Church and a leader of the SCLC, the organization famously helmed by Martin Luther King, Jr. Thus two men representing the two great political religious movements of the latter half of the twentieth century, though they sat at far ends of the political spectrum, united in a very public way to proclaim Moon's innocence and decry government overreach. It was a spectacular optical show of unity, offering to the public a version of Moon's plight that reached past politics and toward the more fundamental issue of religious freedom.

Falwell spoke first, saying that while the occasion of the conference was Moon's release, the issue at hand was religious freedom for all. He took pains to emphasize that he had never met Reverend Moon, but nor could he stand idly by as Moon's rights were attacked. Falwell conceded that the Unification Church might be an "unpopular church today," but couldn't any other church be targeted in a similar fashion? After several speakers from different religious freedom organizations and various congregation expressed support for Moon, Falwell introduced Dr. Joseph Lowery, president of the SCLC. Lowery saw even larger stakes in Moon's imprisonment: "the Moon case is particularly frightening, because not only is the issue of

[405] See *United States v. Moon*, 718 F.2d 1210 (2d Cir. 1983).

religious liberty involved, but perhaps also the issue of racial discrimination." Lowery went on to explain that churches were significant not only for the religious and spiritual services they provided but because, as in the base of civil rights, they acted as a "bulwark" for the struggle for liberation. Lowery saved special critique for "the president of the united states who steadfastly claims to uphold the separation of church and state and who proclaims his support of religious freedom has been strangely silent as a number of intrusions swell to an unprecedented level during his administration." During questions and answers following the statements, Falwell echoed Lowery's call for a response from the president: "I think that the president should pardon Reverend Moon, I think he was the victim of a railroad job, and I think we are all losers in the religious community because of it." One member of the press asked the speakers if they were in personal contact with Moon. While Lowery responded that he had met Moon once, during a visit to him at Danbury during his incarceration, Falwell reiterated his distance from Moon personally: "By intent I have not contacted him because I knew one day this press conference would be held and I wanted to look everybody in the eye and say I'm on nobody's payroll and I haven't talked to anybody and exchanged any expressions of support or whatever. I'm here because I believe in what I am doing here."[406]

Later that evening, an elaborate banquet was held in Moon's honor. Moon, his wife, and his right hand man Bo Hi Pak attended the "God & Freedom Banquet," but Jerry Falwell did not. Moon was feted by religious leaders, grassroots activists, and politicians, and held up as a paragon of resilience, faith, and integrity in the face of government repression. Neither the press conference nor the banquet left any questions about Moon's conservative political proclivities, and in particular his commitment to fighting communism, which emerged as a consistent theme for many speakers. Moon and his group were ever attuned to optics however, and were careful to forge a politically, racially, and culturally diverse coalition to speak on behalf of Moon as a symbol of the vulnerability of American religious freedom.

Donald Sills acted as the master of ceremonies. Sills was the president of the Coalition for Religious Freedom, a religious freedom organization founded by the UC to promote Moon's cause. At the time of its founding in 1984, the CRF boasted an executive board featuring a who's who of Christian right luminaries, including Falwell, Tim LaHaye, and televangelist Jimmy Swaggart.[407] Sills spoke with the confidence and fluidity of a pastor very comfortable expounding on religious ideas in front of a large group, and kept the tone jovial and collegial. When introducing Robert Grant, a key religious conservative activist, he noted that Walter Cronkite himself had credited Grant largely with Reagan's election, adding with a chuckle "this might make Dr. Lowery want to throw something at him." Lowery playfully pretended to throw water on Grant as everyone laughed. It was a small, silly moment, but one that achieved precisely the desired effect: Moon's case could bring together even the bitterest political enemies "in love," as Jerry Falwell liked to say, for the cause of religious freedom from government persecution. The event also harnessed the power of religious political action, as Sills beamed: "Isn't it refreshing, ladies and gentlemen to sense a spirit of God that moves not only through the church but periodically through the halls of Congress? It's great. That's what this nation is all about."

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[406]"Rev Sun Myung Moon welcomed by the Christian community, God & Freedom Banquet, 8/20/1985," Youtube, posted by user Our True Father Sun Myung Moon, April 20, 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a-fmC1EnBdY

[407] Sara Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare: The Politics of the Christian Right* (South End Press, 1989), 69.

The congenial atmosphere around Moon's release and cause was bolstered by the order of speakers, which demonstrated the diversity of his sympathizers. Two white, conservative State Representatives spoke first, celebrating Moon's actions against communism. Robert Foray and Dieter Bayer immediately mentioned how critical CAUSA was to American freedom and how glad they were to be involved, even if they received "a little heat from the press" every once in a while.[408] They presented Moon with an elaborate card, celebrating his contributions to the cause of American freedom, by which they meant anticommunism, and his bravery in the face of government repression. They were followed by words from Walter Fauntroy, a high-profile Black Democrat who congratulated Moon on his critical efforts at standing up for religious liberty. Then Utah State Representative Frances Merrill rose to read a telegram from her brother, Mormon Senator Orrin Hatch: "Welcome back Reverend Moon from an unjust time in prison. It was a miscarriage of justice and in my opinion an embarrassment to the United Sates. You are an example to others advocating freedom of religion and we look forward to your continued fight for religious alternatives to communism. Sincerely, Senator Orrin Hatch."[409] This reading was followed by Robert Gopher of the international Powwow Society, a Native American group.

After various speakers, including Robert Grant and Joseph Lowery, took the stage extolling Moon but even more condemning the actions of bureaucracy and the government, Moon himself made remarks. His speech was somewhat rambling and over 20 minutes long, and could be hard for those unattuned to his style and philosophy to follow. He agreed with the estimation that "today is not about a personal welcome for the Reverend Moon" but for the common cause of freedom. Noting that he had been in prison 6 times, he claimed that none of these incarcerations were because of "personal actions," but rather resulted from persecution. Indeed, his own work and that of the UC had long been "misunderstood and persecuted." As NRM scholar James Lewis has noted, the UC "embraced a theology of redemptive suffering"[410] which accorded with Moon's own account of his life as meaningful precisely because of his persecution by various regimes, be it the Korean communists or the United States government.

Eventually, Moon began to go more deeply into his ideas and revelations, especially about love and the eternal parents, Adam and Eve. While his points might have been sort of opaque to the uninitiated, they would have understood a baseline conservatism running throughout his remarks, including constant references to the centrality of the family, marriage, and purity. Anyone familiar with Moon's theology would have recognized these as central themes in many sermons and texts, but in the presence of the diverse and celebrated group at the God and Freedom Banquet, he did not explore many of the more controversial parts of his own theology. He did, in his extensive remarks on Adam and Eve, note that marriage and the perfection of love between husband and wife, were among God's chief purpose in creation.[411] How wonderful it would have been, Reverend Moon told the crowd, if Adam and Eve could have fulfilled their roles as the eternal True Parents of humanity. True love is the love between a man and a woman, and so pure is this love that to "violate it is a crime of universal magnitude." Moon listed several such violations, including: the corruption of youth for the breakup of families,

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[408] CSPAN, "God and Freedom Banquet," August 20, 1985: https://www.c-span.org/video/?125611-1/god-freedom-banquet.

[409] Ibid. That same year, Hatch held a hearing on religious freedom which prominently featured Reverend Moon and his case. Hatch would continue to be a close friend of the Moons for decades.

[410] James R. Lewis, *Cults in America: A Reference Handbook*, Contemporary World Issues (Santa Barbara, Calif: ABC-CLIO, 1998), 91.

[411] CSPAN, "God and Freedom Banquet," August 20, 1985: https://www.c-span.org/video/?125611-1/god-freedom-banquet

incest, homosexuality and "other unspeakable crimes of the world we live in today. The idea of creation is to achieve the perfect family."[412] This speech conveyed Moon's and the UC's commitment to the main pillars of Christian conservatism: the religious freedom issues that had brought them all together, the efforts against communism so frequently mentioned to demonstrate Moon's commitment to American freedom, and now the conservative sexual mores that drove the mission of the UC and its True Father (as Reverend Moon was considered by his followers.)

Robert Grant took the stage as the first main speaker of the night at the God and Freedom Banquet. Grant might not have been the most famous defender of Moon's, but he was perhaps the staunchest and the person most closely affiliated with both the religious right and the Unification Church. In his speech, Grant decried the current state of religious freedom in the US, where a secular bureaucracy had banned children from prayer in schools and would not allow seniors to pray over government-issued meals. This was an America in which "an unpopular Oriental religious leader would be jailed by a hostile bureaucracy for expressing and exercising his religious convictions in accordance with the instructions of his followers and his church."[413] The nation's founding fathers, Grant went on, would be horrified that their vision of a country free to worship had been so corrupted.

Grant's worldview dovetailed with Moon's in the sense that he felt that God had to be at the center of all political action. He founded Christian Voice in 1978 as an advocacy group, similar to Falwell's Moral Majority, focused on injecting Christian morals into conservative politics. Christian Voice's founding also demonstrated the tangled webs weaved between the Christian right and the Unification Church. According to Rick Perlstein, Christian Voice's "greatest coup" was to poach a Washington legislative director named Gary Jarmin away from another organization, the American Conservative Union.[414] Jarmin, a consummate organizer, had previously been an official in the Unification Church, and likely served as an important liaison. Christian Voice pioneered "moral report cards," rating politicians according to where they stood on important Christian issues. Christian Voice developed from antigay and antipornography groups in California and was key in promoting a pro-family values agenda in conservative circles. They were part of a larger cadre of conservative Christian groups and leaders, and shared many contacts and allies with the UC: Orrin Hatch, for instance, at one point served on Christian Voice's board.[415]

Support for Moon was not only the result of an affinity for religious freedom: Moon's organization poured itself into other conservative issues too, including the promotion of religious and socially conservative candidates. The left-leaning magazine *Mother Jones* published an exposé in 1985 outlining many financial connections between Moon's group(s) and the Christian right, describing for instance the substantial financial support Moon and Pak provided to Tim LaHaye and his organization ACTV (the American Coalition for Traditional Values) for their costly relocation effort.[416] Moon's association with the Christian right ran deep, and their rallying of support behind him was an outgrowth of a much more involved political and financial relationship.

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[412] Ibid.
[413] Ibid.
[414] Perlstein, *Reaganland*, 486.
[415] Paul A. Djupe and Laura R. Olson, *Encyclopedia of American Religion and Politics* (Infobase Publishing, 2014), 99.
[416] Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 70.

Most notably, the church used its vast wealth and resources to fund anticommunist efforts. It had been involved in anticommunism and the promotion of rightwing political ideologies since the founding of the Freedom Leadership Foundation (FLF) in the late 1960s. CAUSA, founded in 1980, was a far cry from a student organization. Much more well-funded and developed, the organization engaged in costly and extensive anticommunist efforts all over the western hemisphere. This organization would become one of the most controversial and active UC groups, deeply admired by conservative allies and reviled by those on the left. CAUSA promoted a philosophy common across the UC, which it called "God-ism," presumably in contrast to the atheist worldview promoted by communism. Its professed goal was to mount "an ideological offensive against the decadent ideology of Marxism-Leninism…by stressing the importance of a positive, God-affirming perspective of ethics and morality as the basis for free societies."[417] This mission statement was featured prominently at the beginning of a brochure for the America Leadership Conference, a CAUSA conference held in honor of the bicentennial of the US constitution. Speakers at the conference included many old friends of the UC, including Grant and Orrin Hatch, as well as an array of politicians and military leaders. CAUSA demonstrates just one of the many links between the UC and the Christian right in the United States, as they donated $500,000 dollars to the National Conservative Political Action Committee (NCPAC), headed by Paul Weyrich.[418] Terry Dolan, an early member of Christian Voice and co-founder and Chairman of NCPAC also sat on the advisory board of CAUSA, which invested significant time and resources into recruiting Christian leaders in the US to help it promote "God-ism" in response to atheist communism.

CAUSA was a global organization, but was especially active in Latin America. One Washington Post exposé from 1983 outlines in detail the group's backing of various rightwing and anticommunist candidates in Guatemala, Honduras, and other countries. CAUSA received much opposition from the powerful Catholic Church in most of these nations, which opposed both its interference in local and national politics as well as its association with the Unification Church. CAUSA engaged in a diverse set of initiatives to promote anticommunism in Latin America, including the establishment of radio stations, purchasing controlling interests in major banks, backing rightwing candidates, holding conferences, and a host of other activities. Pak himself expressed support for rightwing dictator Augusto Pinochet of Chile, and said that he hoped that one day people living under the yoke of communism would recognize Chile as an inspiration.[419]

Bo Hi Pak served a primary role as both a leader of CAUSA and Moon's closest aide. Pak, a former Colonel in the South Korean Army, devoted much of his considerable energy and time to political causes, in particular anticommunism and global politics. Before he found himself catapulted into the limelight because of the Fraser subcommittee investigation, Pak had worked as Moon's man in Washington for years. As Miss Kim and Mr. Choi grew the UC on the west coast, speaking the language of local youth culture and politics, Pak was busy forging relationships with Washington insiders. He became increasingly central to the organization as time went on, and by the 1980s was the main point of contact for Robert Grant and various conservative political figures in the US and abroad. In 1999, a book of his speeches was compiled by the Church, with introductions from a number of illustrious associates. Grant wrote

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[417] American Leadership Conference brochure, ND, Box 116, American Religions Collection, University of California, Santa Barbara.
[418] Michael Isikoff, "Church Spends Millions on its Image," *Washington Post*, September 17, 1984.
[419] Joanne Omang, "Moon's 'Cause' Takes Aim at Communism in Americas," *Washington Post,* August 28, 1983.

one such introduction, speaking on the "very close and treasured friendship" he had developed with Pak over the years, who he described as a "patriot who loves this country more passionately than do most-homegrown Americans."[420]

Pak and Grant led the formation of the American Freedom Coalition in 1987. The AFC featured a roster of prominent Christian right figures such as Richard Viguerie, Grant, and others. It's initially funding came from the UC, and Bo Hi Pak served as its director. In the uncertain period after the Reagan years ended, many on the Christian right felt that they needed to ensure continued influence within the Republican Party. Grant even threatened to form a third party if the GOP did not adequately reflect the principles—in both foreign and domestic policy—of the Christian right. He thought that the Christian right had failed to build adequate alliances with a variety of potential allies, and thus needed a diverse coalition like the AFC. The organization reflection a familiar UC pattern of conservative politics within an ostensibly bipartisan and multiracial group, as the AFC numbered among its original officers both Grant and Viguerie but also famed Black civil rights leader Ralph Abernathy. Former congressmen from both parties—Richard Ichord (D-MO) and Bob Wilson (R-CA) also sat on the board.[421]

In spite of threats to break with the Republican Party, the AFC ultimately threw its weight behind the party's 1988 candidate, George HW Bush. They published extensive voter guides, outlining the positions of Bush in contrast to his Democratic challenger, Michael Dukakis, on a range of foreign and domestic issues. These issues including familiar Christian bugaboos like abortion and homosexuality, as well as each candidate's views on "freedom fighters" like the Mujahadeen in Afghanistan and the contras in Nicaragua.

Acceptance of the UC into the Republican fold did not signal the end of the ACM or the cult wars. The more familiar cult wars of the 1970s remained bipartisan, but ultimately the goals of ACM and the terms of debate established in the 1970s became deployed for conservative causes in the culture wars of the 1980s. ACM organizations professionalized into CAN (the Cult Awareness Network) and the AFF (American Family Foundation). These organizations continued to lobby for conservatorship laws, to publicize the cult issue, and to promote resources for families who felt victimized by the cults. Mainstream religious and political bodies too continued to contend with the cult scare: in 1982, the national Parent Teacher Association convention called for greater attention to cult recruiting techniques of students; in 1985, the Vatican released a report on cults and new religious movements; and in 1988, Democrat Tom Lantos sponsored a bill to establish national Cult Awareness Week in honor of the 10th anniversary of Jonestown.[422] At the same time, the fundamental concerns of the cult wars found new expression with the rise of family values politics and the culture wars of the 1980s, which were fundamentally about the narrowing of conceptions of both family and religion to fit a normative worldview. This was always also the project of the anticult movement, even if its partisans came from both conservative and liberal ends of the political spectrum. Ultimately the increasingly culturally polarized 1980s emerged, in no small part, from the debates sparked by the cult wars of the 1970s and the terrain on which these wars were fought.

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[420] "Introduction by Robert Grant," in Bo Hi Pak, *The Truth is My Sword*, 1999 edition.
[421] Diamond, *Spiritual Warfare*, 78.
[422] Rep. Tom Lantos, Text of "National Cult Awareness Week" Joint Resolution, November 1, 1988, U.S. House of Representatives; 100th Congress, 1st Session, from the Baptist and Religious Collections, Institute for Church-State Studies Vertical File, Baylor University Digital Collections.

Conclusion

On July 27th, 1993, Mississippi Republican Senator Trent Lott introduced a resolution calling for the establishment of True Parents Day as a national holiday. The breakdown of the American family, he claimed, was responsible for a slew of social ills. Only stable and loving family environments could combat these ills through instilling values of "sacrificial love and truth" in children. Lott then noted that the Women's Federation for World Peace would be sponsoring an event for congress the following day, during which they would "[call] for a renewal of our social commitment to sustain and strengthen families."[423] Lott declared his solidarity with this group in calling for July 28th to be recognized as True Parents Day, and urged others in Congress to do the same.

At first glance, Lott's remarks fall in line with a familiar family values rhetoric often deployed by the right. The speech in fact proved so politically inoffensive as to render it bipartisan: on October 14th of the following year, President Bill Clinton would sign into law a congressional resolution establishing Parents Day (dropping the word "True" from Lott's original proposition) as a national holiday, to be observed every fourth Sunday of July.

In fact, Parents Day had a more interesting backstory than as a milquetoast attempt at a gender-neutral and bipartisan recognition of the admirable public service of parents. True Parents Day had long been celebrated by the Unification Church in honor of Reverend Moon and his wife, Hak Ja Han, as the group's True Parents. Han was the founder of the Women's Federation for World Peace touted by Lott. The WFWP held a meeting the day before the Senator's remarks on the congressional floor. Before an esteemed group of approximately 100 lawmakers in the Dirksen Building on Capitol Hill, Han would receive a glowing introduction from Senator Orrin Hatch of Utah, who noted the importance of family before giving Han the stage, emphasizing that he "consider[ed] it a really rare privilege to have the honor of introducing Mrs. Hak Ja Han Moon, my friend."[424] Mrs. Moon spoke on behalf of herself, her organization, and her husband. She noted his call to spread a message of truth in the wake of the bloody communist takeover of their native Korea after World War II; his persecution in the face of false accusations of sexual impropriety; the scope of the work the WFWP was engaged in; the common Unificationist belief in America as God's chosen land; and, by the end, noted in fairly certain terms her belief that she and Reverend Moon were, indeed, the True Parents. For Han, it seems, Republican (and congressional) support for True Parents Day amounted to nothing less than a step toward legitimate recognition of Moon, herself, and their church as the conduits of truth, American patriotism, and global salvation. Symbolically, this moment represented the apex of the UC's embrace by Republicans in Congress and demonstrates just how central family values rhetoric was to their legitimacy as a religious organization.

As in the 1980s, however, the success of the UC did not translate into acceptance of all NRMs into the mainstream in the 1990s. The deadly 1993 confrontation at Mount Carmel in Waco, Texas between the Branch Davidians and agents from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms once again made NRMs and their potential for violence headline news. A tense 51-day standoff, spurred by reports of an illegal arsenal of weapons and rampant child sexual abuse,

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[423] "True Parents Day," *Congressional Record* 139 (1993) p. 17016. (Text from: *Congressional Record Permanent Digital Collection*); accessed June 9, 2022.

[424] "Orrin Hatch and the Moonies," uploaded by user Freedom of Mind Resource Center on October 2, 2006, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QFZPJT8yMPE. The FMRC is run by Steven Hassan, a former UC member and anti-cult activist.

left four ATF agents dead, while 76 Davidians (25 of them children), including their leader David Koresh, perished in a firefight with federal agents. The government became interested in the Davidians for several reasons, most importantly the fact that the group was potentially violent and hoarding an arsenal of firearms. The most publicly touted cause of the investigation, and justification for the violent force used by the government, were allegations that Koresh engaged in improper sexual relationships with minors in the group.[425] Defending the actions of the ATF at the 1995 Congressional hearings on Waco, Democratic Representative Chuck Schumer of New York argued that it was necessary to center Koresh's depravity in considerations of what had happened at Mount Carmel: "Let's be very clear, David Koresh was a dangerous, sick man who molested children, preached violence, and led his followers into a horrible suicide…Davis Koresh sexually abused children and called it holy."[426] As in much of the testimony at Dole's post-Jonestown hearing in 1979, child abuse and endangerment overshadowed the religious dimensions of the group at hand. In Schumer's testimony, and much of the media surrounding the event, Koresh was a "sinful messiah" symbolizing the worst excesses of the stereotypical cult leader and bearing responsibility for the deaths of his followers.

This impression of Koresh closely followed the imprint of Jim Jones, and the specter of Jonestown loomed large throughout the standoff and its aftermath. Tim Stoen, whose custody case concerning his son John spurred the initially scrutiny of the Jonestown settlement, contacted the FBI on March 28, 1993. He told them that it was "increasingly likely that you will have a mass suicide on your hands" unless they changed tactics and retreated, as signs of "a military invasion…feeds the Armageddon consciousness of the leader and plays into his hold over his followers."[427] A synopsis of this conversation with Stoen, as well as dozens of others, were attached to the FBI file on Waco in a document entitled the "Suicide Addendum." This document included opinions from former Davidians and other NRM members, as well as various experts, comparing Koresh to Jim Jones and assessing the likelihood that the stand-off would end in mass death, as at Jonestown. The situation that led to the fire which engulfed the compound and ended the siege on April 19, 1993, has been the subject of much speculation, with some survivors insisting that the government started the fire while officials investigations concluded that the fires began inside the compound. What is clear is that the deaths at Mount Carmel were not orchestrated and premeditated like those at Jonestown 15 years earlier, but were the result of a protracted, complex conflict between the group and law enforcement.

Politicians, reporters, and the ACM invoked Jonestown to justify the government's action at Waco and primed the public to think of the Branch Davidians as a cult. The notion that members of the group acted without pressure from the outside, and that their beliefs caused their deaths, was amplified most notably by President Clinton. When asked at a press conference about the resignation of Attorney General Janet Reno, Clinton dismissed that "anyone would

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[425] Evidence of abuse of children by Koresh was inconclusive at the time of the siege, but he and the group had long been hounded by such allegations and subjected to several inquiries. After the fact, the Justice Department stated that there had not been enough evidence to convict Koresh of a crime, but that the historical evidence "suggested" that he was abusing followers and therefore was relevant to the ATF's decision to use tear gas at Mount Carmel. For a more detailed analysis of these charges, see: U.S. Department of Justice, "Report to the Deputy Attorney General on the Events at Waco, Texas": https://www.justice.gov/archives/publications/waco/report-deputy-attorney-general-events-waco-texas-child-abuse.

[426] Remarks of Rep. Charles Schumer, Hearings on Waco, July 19 1995, box 198, folder 15, Louis Jolyon West papers (Collection 590). UCLA Library Special Collections, Charles E. Young Research Library, UCLA.

[427] FBI message sheet on conversation with Timothy Stoen, March 28 1993, Jonestown Institute at SDSU: https://jonestown.sdsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Waco-Stoen.pdf.

suggest that the attorney general should resign because some religious fanatics murdered themselves."[428] Tim Reiterman, the journalist who had survived the airstrip attack in Guyana that took Leo Ryan's life, wrote a piece for the *Los Angeles Times* mere days after the final confrontation whose headline summarizes the connection between Koresh and Jones: "Parallel Roads Led to Jonestown, Waco: Similar Forces Shaped Jim Jones and David Koresh into the Violent, Power-Mad 'Messiahs' Who Doomed Their Followers to Death."[429] The ACM and its largest organization, the Cult Awareness Network, promoted an association between Jonestown and Waco. At the time of the siege, Leo Ryan's daughter Patricia led CAN, and alongside her colleague Cynthia Kisser supported the analysis of Clinton and others who saw the Davidians as suicidal religious wackos. Ryan understood the events at Waco as one of total control by a leader, who could get his followers to do anything, "including suicide, including murder."[430] By contrast, sociologist Nancy Ammerman released a report in September 1993, largely based on her oral testimony before Congress in July, claiming that the government had made a fatal error in not treating the Davidians as a religious group committed to a set of beliefs. Law enforcement, she wrote, "should have understood the pervasiveness of religious experimentation in American history and the fundamental right of groups like the Davidians to practice their religion." Ammerman understood that groups like the Davidians were not strangers in the American religious landscape, and that taking them more seriously as a religion had led to fatal assumptions about their status as violent cult.[431]

Jonestown, and cult talk more generally, has not left our current political discourse. If anything, as political polarization has increased since Donald Trump's election in 2016, each side has deployed the language of the cult wars in order to paint their opponent as beyond the pale of normative politics. During Trump's 2019 impeachment hearings, Republican Congressman Devin Nunes blasted Democratic efforts, describing how Democrats attempting to foil the president met for weeks in the basement of the Capitol "like some kind of strange cult." Representative Jackie Speier, who had occupied Leo Ryan's former seat after she was shot alongside the Congressman in Guyana, shot back at Nunes on Twitter:

> Devin Nunes calling the Intelligence Committee's fact-finding mission a cult is dispicable (sic). I know about cults. Cults are led by maniacal narcissists who expect complete adoration and relinquishment of independent thought. I suggest Mr. Nunes look elsewhere.[432]

Speier's implication that the President's following resembled a cult did not originate with her. After Republican Senator Bob Corker of Tennessee said that he feared the party had become "cult-ish," Donald Trump Jr. retorted in an interview with *Fox and Friends* that

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[428] James D. Tabor and Eugene V. Gallagher, *Why Waco?*, (University of California Press, 2020), 159, https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520919181.
[429] Tim Reiterman, *Los Angeles Times*, April 23, 1993.
[430] Tabor and Gallagher, *Why Waco*, 150.
[431] Nancy Ammerman, "Report to the Justice and Treasury Departments Regarding law enforcement interaction with the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas," September 3, 1993. Accessed via Hartford Institute for Religion Research digital archive: http://hirr.hartsem.edu/bookshelf/ammermanarticle1.html.
[432] Rep. Jackie Speier (D-CA), in a tweet from October 31, 2019, https://twitter.com/RepSpeier/status/1189910225526104064

"if it's a cult, it's because they [Trump's supporters] like what my father is doing."[433] Whether embracing the cult label, or hurling it as an epithet at opponents, the Trump years inaugurated a period in which the two parties not only disagreed, but questioned each other's legitimacy by labeling the other as a cult.

Cult language is not reserved for use by political figureheads hoping to discredit their adversaries. In recent years, deprogrammers and other "experts" on mind control have been enlisted to discuss how their work with former NRM members—or as former NRM members—might help families extract their loved ones from controversial political movements. Ex-Unification Church member Steven Hassan has made a career since the 1980s in counseling families and former NRM members about their experience in cults. In 2019, he published a book entitled *The Cult of Trump: a Leading Cult Expert Explains How the President Uses Mind Control.* In it, he compares Trump to Jim Jones, David Koresh, Sun Myung Moon, and others, drawing on common tropes of the ACM as a means of discrediting both Trump and his supporters, who he argues have been the victims of mind control rather than partisans in a political conflict.[434] Hassan has become a fixture on cable news and other public outlets, further amplifying the connection between current political divides and the cult wars. In 2021, NPR published a profile of Hassan, Susan Benscoter (another ex-UC member) and other former "cult" adherents working with families and individuals involved in the QAnon movement.[435] QAnon is a complex conspiracy theory that combines an array of varyingly farfetched rightwing suspicions: for instance that there is a network of elites covertly running the Democratic party as well as the government in general—referred to within the movement as the "deep state"—as well as such as rampant Satanic Ritual Abuse within these circles. Mostly circulated in online message boards, QAnon (which refers to the theory's main author, an anonymous government insider known as Q) became popular with the more extreme elements of President Trump's supporters. For these "cult" experts, involvement with QAnon and belief in the disinformation propagated within its online community do not only represent problems of media distrust or political culture. Rather it is evidence with regard to a person's lack free will and ability to think for themselves. While today it is unpopular to advocate for deprogramming, which has been considered controversial and overly confrontational for decades, nonetheless these practitioners advocate for similar processes of extraction as they might for those wrapped up in stereotypical religious cults.

Uses of the word cult in the political sphere rely on the notion that there is such a thing as a cult—that once a movement or a group gets beyond the pale of acceptability, it ventures into cult territory and poses a danger for its adherents. Even more sympathetic popular works that try to inject nuance into the discussion tend to reproduce this idea. Amanda Montell's 2021 book *Cultish* provides a case in point. Montell argues that cults operate mainly through language, and as such things that do not present as obviously culty can qualify. Montell's project appears at first to be sympathetic, for the most part, to

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[433] Donald Trump Jr. interview with *Fox and Friends*, June 2018: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NtvqxVQLu7g.

[434] Steven Hassan, *The Cult of Trump: A Leading Cult Expert Explains How the President Uses Mind Control* (New York: Free Press, 2019).

[435] Tovia Smith, "'Exit Counselors' Strain To Pull Americans Out Of A Web Of False Conspiracies," *NPR*, March 3, 2021, sec. National, https://www.npr.org/2021/03/03/971457702/exit-counselors-strain-to-pull-americans-out-of-a-web-of-false-conspiracies.

NRMs—if everything is a cult, perhaps we should be more sympathetic to the most maligned and publicized groups—but ultimately assumes that cult is a stable categorization. Montell quotes another contemporary author on spirituality and modern society, Tara Isabella Burton, who similarly argues that religion and spirituality permeate many areas of life even for those who identify as secular. For both writers, the line between cult and not cult, the religious and the secular, are constantly blending. Montell writes, for instance: "In a social-media centered society, we've all been rendered at once cult leader and follower."[436] Even if the goal is to challenge the marginalization of cults, Montell's approach does little more than broaden what might qualify as a cult rather than acknowledging why and how the term is never neutral, but rather does important political work.

The work presented here has attempted to show that any attempt to meaningfully categorize a group as a cult is ultimately futile. A cult is not merely a pejorative term for an NRM. Rather cults are powerful specters through which people express anxieties over family, politics, and the future. NRMs, by contrast, are movements joined by real people, and have been part of American history since the nation's inception. What changes, then, is what the center deems eligible for incorporation and inclusion. Times of uncertainty and upheaval might more easily breed extremist movements and ideologies, but they also make the mainstream more suspicious of those at its fringes. Perhaps it is more useful to focus on protecting the most vulnerable, whether or not they are part of a minority group, rather than to figure out which groups are most likely to offend by relying on dubious stereotype and suspicion of the unfamiliar.

Current culture wars also demonstrate the enduring salience and important legacy of the cult wars. Moral panics today share many of the same targets and victims including children, brainwashing, and cultural/political decay. Likewise, many questions center on hallmark notions of the cult wars like authenticity, conversion, free will, and the rights of families. Schools, for instance, remain a key site of the culture wars. The idea that children attend schools and are conditioned by teachers to believe in secular, progressive ideologies—including conservative bêtes noires critical race theory and progressive ideas about gender identity—relies on the very same presuppositions of the cult wars. Namely, that children are vulnerable to influences beyond the home; that adults with political agendas seek to convert or brainwash young people; and that these efforts constitute not only a threat to individual families and children but to the nation as a whole. Sometimes, as in the Satanic Panic, children's bodily autonomy is at issue. Many QAnon believers, for instance, insist that the Democratic Party violates and tortures children in secret. This theory shares with the Satanic Panic a lack of any physical evidence. Still, the theory remains powerful. Without the cult wars, we would not have the culture wars in their current iteration. Our fears would be different, as would our world.

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[436] Amanda Montell, *Cultish: The Language of Fanaticism* (New York, NY: Harper Wave, 2021), 280.

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